

HENRIK IBSEN  
*Plays and Problems*

BY OTTO HELLER



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BY OTTO HELLER

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*“ Je ne propose rien, je n’ impose  
rien, j’ expose.”—JOSEPH DUNOYER.*



## PREFACE

THE motto of this book, which has been adopted from Werner Sombart's brilliant work on *Socialism*, is meant to indicate at one and the same time the purpose of the great writer to whom it is devoted and, *si parva componere magnis licet*, the author's own unpretentious aim. The literature that has gathered round the name of Ibsen is doubtless deemed by many people to be more than sufficiently copious; and, taken as a whole, it represents a very respectable level of critical ability. Nevertheless, a new attempt at interpreting Ibsen for the English reader can probably justify itself. In the first place, by the poet's steadily increasing popularity and his growing importance as a factor of dramatic progress. In the second, by its obvious difference from similar treatises in the general point of view, a difference which naturally leads to a somewhat revised estimate of the various groups of dramas as regards their artistic and ethical importance. Whereas in practically all the other English books on the subject the *romantic* and *historical* plays are ranked highest and are given a correspondingly greater amount of space and attention, the present study is avowedly devoted more particularly to the *social* or *problem* plays, and that because of the author's conviction that these plays are more closely connected with our own private and social concerns. The Selected List of writings appended to the book enables the reader to sup-

plement from other sources his information about such parts and aspects of Ibsen's work as are not discussed here with sufficient fullness to answer his purpose.

It has been the author's endeavor to acknowledge his specific obligations to other writers. It will be noticed that, both in the text and in the notes, he has drawn quite freely upon the standard English translation of Ibsen, the *Collected Works*, edited by William Archer. From this edition most of the illustrative passages are derived; likewise, the admirable introductions to the several volumes have yielded a large quantity of helpful material. The availability of such excellent translations and, besides, of handy editions of Ibsen's letters, speeches, and jottings, has made it possible to base this presentation step by step upon authentic documents and to ascertain the philosophical significance of views expressed by the characters in action by means of their incessant comparison with the poet's own confidential expressions of opinion. In reading this or any other book on Ibsen the serious student would do well to keep the *Works*, *Correspondence*, *Speeches and New Letters*, and the "literary remains" constantly by his side.

The author has, from practical considerations, followed Mr. Archer's method of transliterating the Norwegian names and titles. This has been done at the risk of sacrificing entire consistency. For this reason and because of the somewhat problematical state of spelling in Dano-Norwegian itself, a word will occasionally appear in a twofold orthographical form, as indeed it does within one and the same original edition.

It is hoped that the full index may materially enhance



the usefulness of this study as a book of reference. The Selected List of writings recognizes under one of its sub-headings the unique importance of Ibsen for the progress of the woman cause.

Acknowledgments are due to Dr. Lee M. Hollander, of the University of Wisconsin, and Professor George T. Flom, of the University of Illinois, for the contribution of several helpful data. The Index was prepared by Mrs. W. R. Mackenzie. During the printing of this book the author has had the invaluable assistance of his wife.

OTTO HELLER.

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY,

ST. LOUIS, June, 1912.



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## EXPLANATION OF THE NOTES

THE principal abbreviations used in the references to Ibsen's writings are: —

*M* = Henrik Ibsen. *Samlede Vaerker*. Mindeudgave. Kristiania og Köbenhavn: Gyldendalske Boghandel. Nordisk Forlag. 1906-07.

*CW* = The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen. Copyright edition. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1908. (11 volumes; vol. XII, added in 1911, contains Notes, Scenarios, and Drafts of the Modern Plays.)

*SW* = Henrik Ibsens *Sämtliche Werke in deutscher Sprache*. Durchgesehen und eingeleitet von Georg Brandes, Julius Elias, Paul Schenker. Vom Dichter autorisiert. Berlin: S. Fischer, Verlag.

*SW*<sup>II</sup> = the continuation (*Zweite Reihe*) of *SW*. *Nachgelassene Schriften in vier Bänden*. Herausgegeben von Julius Elias und Halvdan Koht. Berlin: S. Fischer, Verlag. 1909 (used here in preference over vol. XII of *CW*, because of its greater completeness; and in preference over the *Efterladte Skrifter* on account of the unfamiliarity of most readers with the language of the original).

*C* = The Correspondence of Henrik Ibsen. The translation edited by Mary Morison. London: Hodder and Stoughton. 1905. Identical with: *Letters of Henrik Ibsen*. Translated by John Nilsen Laurvik and Mary Morison. New York: Duffield and Company. 1908.

*SNL* = *Speeches and New Letters* [of] Henrik Ibsen. Translated by Arne Kildal. With an Introduction by Lee M. Hollander and a Bibliographical Appendix. Boston: Richard G. Badger. 1910.

References indicated by superior *numbers* are to Ibsen's writings, including his letters, speeches, etc., and generally, to material contained in the above publications; these references are placed at the foot of the page. Superior *letters* refer to notes at the end of the book. Notes referring to special parts of the plays, and also, as a rule, the quotations in English, are made on the basis of *CW*; in these, only volumes and pages are indicated, unless there is special need of repeating the title. Hence, for example, vol. II, p. 300, would stand for *CW*, vol. II, p. 300.



## INTRODUCTION

THE aim of showing the importance of Henrik Ibsen, both as a poet and a moral teacher, suggests at the outset a definite and emphatic assertion that he was a highly potent factor in modern life in both these spiritual functions. A score of years ago Ibsen was still universally the object of embittered contests and argument. But now he is already an historic personage and his great cultural significance is acknowledged in all parts of the civilized world. In this country the recognition of the great Scandinavian has been slower than elsewhere; but now here also a change from the reluctant attitude towards him is making itself rapidly felt.

The reason for this tardiness in the acceptance of one of the greatest men of modern times may be worth pointing out. It is due to our luckless democratic way of looking at all things through the childish eyes of the majority, the same habit to which we owe our national deprecation of art and our backwardness in so many phases of intellectual life.

What does the "compact majority" expect of its intellectual leaders and masters? Merely that they conform to its ruling tastes and desires. And so reasonable at first blush seems this demand, as to make us seriously doubt whether a writer may safely be counted among the great unless his thought and art are in harmony with at least a fairly representative number of his contem-

poraries. If anything like a law could be claimed to have governed the evolution of art, it would in all likelihood be this, that, throughout the so-called golden ages, artists, with few exceptions, have in a rational degree subserved the preferences of their public. Of none of the arts may this be stated with fuller truth than of the drama. The Greek tragedy, with its slow-wound action, stately tirades, and long-breathed choral harangues, was fashioned to the taste of a people fond of philosophic expatiation, addicted to dignified leisure, accustomed to manage their life to the order of a pronounced æsthetic bias. So Shakespeare's drama, in its nervous, not infrequently jerky movement, its ornate phraseology, its vivid spectacular situations, was admirably adapted to the pompous style of England during the later Renaissance, to audiences made up of courtiers and burgesses, armigerous both of them and amply inured to the tumults and atrocities of militant politics. Molière wrought for a public basking in the effulgence of the *Roi Soleil*, quick-witted, dignifiedly gay in external demeanor, and rather more refined in speech than sentiment. Their keen sense of humor, still plentifully lacking in delicacy, loved to be tickled by base ribaldry, yet was finical enough to make acknowledgment with smiles, not guffaws.

Such is the ancestry of modern German drama, and so long as German dramatists rested content with the approbation of the upper castes or of the "intellectuals," the national sense, which as a rule resides rather in the plain people, was largely left unsatisfied. For aristocracy of any sort tends to an international, cosmopolitan form of culture. Even of Goethe, anchored though he was with

his deepest roots in the ground of his nationality, it is true on the whole that he made his appeal to the "elect," not to the "people." Schiller was the first to ring a change on this state of things by addressing himself courageously to the entire population of his country in all its social strata at one time. He was the great popularizer of our theatre, and remained for almost a century the guiding spirit of the German drama of which Schiller's matchless tragedies are still by many people regarded as the surpassing manifestoes. Schiller's position, while it demonstrates a whole people's gratitude to those who respond to its desires, does not however furnish a weapon of self-defense to the "popularizers" of drama, or rather its diluters. Schiller's case rather proves that the power of popular influence wrought upon a poet may be vastly inferior to the strength that radiates from his own personality. Indeed, whereas the secret of ephemeral power is only too often found in paltriness or mediocrity, an influence of enduring force such as Schiller exerts on the Germans can only emanate from a strong and self-assertive character. No poet lives beyond his day who does not exceed the average in mental stature, or who, through a selfish sense of fear of the "general," allows himself to be ground down to the conventional size and shape. Schiller, no less than Ibsen, forced his moral demands tyrannically upon his contemporaries. And in the long run your moral despot, provided he be high-minded, vigorous, and able, has a better chance of fame than the pliant time-server. However, there is a great difference between the two cases. For quite apart from the striking dissimilarities between the poets themselves,

the public, through the gradual growth of social organization, has become greatly altered.

The modern dramatist, unless his lines are unhappily cast in the unpromising soil of the so-called Anglo-Saxon civilizations, where the only emotion which plays a part in the drama is that of love, deals with a public much less homogeneous in tastes and opinions than that of Schiller or Goethe, not to speak of Shakespeare and the ancients. His is a public with many minds, or, what comes to the same thing, a public with a wistfully troubled spirit and a mind not yet made up. Where our ancestors were so restfully sure about things, we are uncertain and skeptical pending the arrival of fresh bulletins from science. We have become aroused to many a subject to which the "good old times" gave scarcely a perturbing thought. We are breaking into the consciousness of strange new meanings in life and nature. As a result, the excuse for a uniform standard of art has disappeared along with a ubiquitous code of moral opinion for the drama of continental Europe; whether temporarily or permanently, cannot be settled here.

The enlightened modern public, then, makes to a moralizing dramatist this all-important concession that there need be no absolute and only way of facing the world. Nor are things always as they seem. A thing that seems astoundingly complicated to one person may strike another as extremely simple, or — more frequently — what appears quite simple to some may impress others as being defiantly intricate. Being independents and skeptics, we grant the poet the same privileges which we arrogate to ourselves, the right of holding personal views and

original intentions; but we are not unthinking skeptics, hence we do not care to have him publish his views abroad unless they are convincing, or at least enlightening and stimulating. With pedants, smatterers, and dabblers we are out of patience, whereas a forceful though never so heterodox personality finds a wider echo and a readier following in the intellectual centres of Europe to-day than was the case at any former period. Thus the worship of heroes has by no means died with our faith in authority. The world still recognizes that it cannot dispense with leaders. Yet there is a difference, according to various states of civilization. For instance, a crudely organized democracy will unhesitatingly reject leaders who, in regard to the major policies of public and private life, are not in accord with the mind of the mass or do not diplomatically pretend to be. Its "great" men are great only in the measure in which they catch and seemingly reflect the spirit of the throng. For example, if it is given to a man by virtue of his station and personal blandishments to emphasize and reinforce the people's natural impulse for civic righteousness, this most elementary manifestation of good will and courage will be enough to magnify to the size of a hero a brave, well-meaning citizen, though intellectually he be never so commonplace. We may well speculate, in the light of this fact, on the popular apotheosis of such "good average" men as William Jennings Bryan or Theodore Roosevelt.

The European order of society, for all its external restraints, makes larger allowances than does the American order for the individualist and iconoclast, for the multifarious varieties of the *studens rerum novarum*,



whose efforts somehow, in spite of conflicts and clashes, converge towards higher common ideals.<sup>a</sup> Consequently that man in whose work the differentiating tendencies of the time are most completely embodied and exposed is bound sooner or later to come into his own, if a unique artistic power seconds his moral purpose. Ibsen was one of the comparatively rare writers who form an independent estimate of moral views and personal problems by their own light instead of reflecting in a pleasing mirror the "general view," which almost of necessity must be fallacious and obsolete.<sup>b</sup> In this or that respect he was unquestionably outranked by many of his contemporaries in Germany, France, Russia, Italy, and Belgium, but what other writer of the nineteenth century has become to the same extent a European influence? While still living, his historic importance was recognized, as the chief expositor of ideas which specifically distinguish our age from the past, and as the discoverer of a new vehicle for their expression. In this typical character he is to be discussed in the following pages; and that *sine ira et studio*; since Ibsen's cause still requires to be brought fairly before the popular opinion of the English-speaking public, we must be scrupulously careful to distinguish between Ibsen the moralist and Ibsen the poet, between the subjective and the objective aspect of his utterance, that is to say, between opinions which he personally advocates and the characteristic views of his *dramatis personæ*.

It is to a lack of this just discrimination that the delay of Ibsen's ascendancy among us is chiefly due. The perplexing effect of such a writer on a public habituated to

the moods, manners, and morals of the Anglo-Saxon stage-land is viewed by a recent witty writer as altogether natural. Theirs was not an attitude of hostility against the Norwegian playwright, but merely the revolt of conservatism against what is unfamiliar and the protest of playful optimism against the perversion of the drama to serious purposes. Such is the judicious opinion of Mr. Frank Moore Colby, who goes on to say: "No doubt the excellent gentlemen who were the most vituperative in the capacity as critics were the most enraptured as playgoers. For a gift like Ibsen's enlivens these jaded folk more than they are willing to admit. Deeply absorbed at the time in the doings of the disagreeable characters, they afterward define their sensation as one of loathing, and they include the playwright in their pious hatred, like newsboys at a melodrama pelting the man in the villain's part. It comes from the national habit of making optimism actually a matter of conscience, and denying the validity of any feeling unless it is a sleepy one. Now, of course, if a man's own wits are precisely on the level of the modern American and English stage, there can be no quarrel with him for disliking Ibsen. If there is no lurking discontent with our stage and its traditions, and with the very best plays of Anglo-Saxon origin produced in this country during the last twenty years, an Ibsen play will surely seem a malicious interruption. What in the world has a good, placid American audience to do with this half-mad old Scandinavian? He writes only for those who go to the theatre to be disturbed." <sup>c</sup>

The cause of our playgoers' indignant dissatisfaction



with Henrik Ibsen is simply the terrible moral earnestness of the man. He feels that certain things which the compact majority has silently conspired to keep quiet should be said, therefore he proceeds to say them. Dr. Stockmann, the "Enemy of the People," represents best among his figures the author's frame of mind. When this doctor discovers that the reputed health resort over which he presides is in reality a pest-hole, he will not join in the proposed conspiracy of silence, but firmly, in loud voice, declares the truth, knowing full well that his utterance must cost him his place and living. This is precisely the case of Ibsen. What is it that makes such cases so exceptional if not the universality of rank cowardice and hypocrisy in large ranks of "good" society? Out of ordinary respect for human intelligence we must credit with an ability to tell the wrong and the evil an enormous number of persons who never, on any account, open their mouths against it. It is due to human nature to concede further that very many people are even aroused, by their fellow creatures' turpidity, to contempt and righteous wrath, yet even they, as a rule, refrain from speaking out. When pressed for reasons, these good people are apt to confess their aversion to polemics, — or they meekly decline to "pose as reformers," and with a tolerant smile inform the impatient advocate of probity that there does not seem much use in fighting against "human nature."

They hold the Panglossian view, — that this is the best of all possible worlds, — and have made up their practical minds to make the best of it. They believe in making the best of things that are bad and always will be bad. And because of this unwreckable faith in the bad-

ness of things, such people are known as — optimists. The determination to speak out the truth, observable in Ibsen as well as in many of his compatriots, is rather characteristic of countries where literature is young and unhackneyed, so that many things have a chance of being said for the first time, coming with warmth, vigor, and virgin freshness straight from the heart. Since out of the mouths of babes and sucklings has been ordained strength, we may in these days look without amazement upon the spectacle of great and mighty nations seeking increase in art and wisdom from the weaker and more undeveloped. Learned Germany and cultured France have been going to school to little Norway and barbaric Russia. My excuse for offering this new study of Henrik Ibsen to the English-speaking public is grounded in a conviction that England and the United States are also becoming "Ibsenreif," ready to listen to the message of the greatest dramatic poet of our age, and one of its foremost social preachers.



# HENRIK IBSEN

## PLAYS AND PROBLEMS

### CHAPTER I

#### IBSEN THE SCANDINAVIAN

THAT great Danish scholar, George Brandes, has commiserated Henrik Ibsen — and, by indirection, himself, — for belonging to a minor nationality. Certainly the herculean task of converting the world to his views is rendered all the more difficult for a writer when but few can comprehend his medium of communication. There may, however, be pointed out some compensations for the disadvantage. In a small country, as a rule, the national pride and national sense are strongly developed. The population of such a country is apt to be more homogeneous in its character, and for this reason it is sometimes easier for a masterful intellect to assert its claim to leadership. Besides, Ibsen addressed himself from the beginning to a larger audience than that of Norway. As a believer in Scandinavian union he used in his works the Dano-Norwegian literary speech — as did Björnson, Lie, Kielland, Hamsun, and many others. At the time when Norway cut itself loose from Denmark (1814) there was no great difference between the two languages; since then they have been growing steadily apart. A movement for the reconstruction of a separate Norse language, based

on the surviving peasant dialects, took its origin from the poet Henrik Wergeland's campaign, to which some reference will presently be made. An increasingly successful agitation for this artificial national language, named *Landsmaal*, has been carried on for upward of half a century, and the movement in its favor, under the name of *Maalstraev*, is still making headway.<sup>a</sup> Ibsen, though he made free use of Norwegian idioms in this *Schriftsprache*, at no time aligned himself on the side of the linguistic reformers.

Our initial consideration is due to the homeland of our poet. Norway, being practically the Ultima Thule of Western civilization and by her insular remoteness prevented from direct contact with central European culture, has had, till recent times, but a loose connection with the literary life of Europe, and has been slower even than her sister nations of Sweden and Denmark to claim a fair place among the culture-producing nations of the earth. The delay was not due to any lack of a national sense for letters. In the very remote past Norsemen took their part vigorously enough in laying the foundations of an imperishable world literature. By their faithful guardianship over a rich treasure of sagas both native and imported, by their proficiency in creating and transmuting the raw material of poetry, the world's store of artistic grandeur and romance has enormously profited. But about the middle period of its history Norway as a radiator of literary culture went, almost suddenly, into a long eclipse. Having lost her autonomy she was reduced, from 1397 till 1814, to a virtual dependency of the Danish Crown. This long period was marked by such a lethargy

of the spiritual activities that it is quite fittingly termed "the night of four centuries." Even the enlightening eighteenth century brought Norway hardly the faintest shimmer of a dawning day. It would not have been surprising had the last promise of a better future automatically perished in this total darkness. When at last Norway issued from her deathlike stupor, it required no deep sagacity to fathom the causes of her salvation. The rich racial strain of modern Norse literature is by no means accidental. It is a heritage preserved by the quiet, steady upkeeping of folk poetry throughout that almost interminable age of depression. By virtue of this basic condition for a literary revival of national scope, some very difficult obstacles were quickly overcome, and Scandinavian literature was able to build up in a short space of time such a tremendous international influence as to surpass the highest hopes of the patriots.

In 1814 Norway reclaimed her lost independence. On May 17th of that year — the day is observed as the chief national holiday — she detached herself permanently from Denmark, formulated her own organic statutes, and joined with Sweden on equal terms in a new dual monarchy. But the birthday of the new literature fell much later. The nineteenth century was more than half gone before Norway ceased to be a negligible factor in the culture of Europe. The same is true, however, of Scandinavia as a whole. Her books were sealed to the English-speaking world by reason of their unfamiliar language, and her fame rested mainly on the achievements of her great discoverers, scientists, and artists: Tycho Brahe, Linnæus, Berzelius, Thorwaldsen. Of her writers, Holberg,

Tegnér, and Andersen were about the only ones that were fairly appreciated.

In Norway from about 1830 a new literature was forming along two divergent lines of development. It will tend to the better comprehension of Ibsen's earlier works to indicate these lines by pointing to the feud between the two factions of which Henrik Wergeland (1808-1845) and Johan Sebastian Welhaven (1807-1873) were the acknowledged leaders. Wergeland's literary activity stood for nationalism, i.e., for the cultivation of specifically Norwegian traits. Although a theologian by education, Wergeland was a radical of decidedly revolutionary proclivities, a rationalist and adherent of eighteenth century deism. He was the author of odes and songs and a lyric-dramatic poem, entitled *Skabelsen, Mennesket og Messias* ("Creation, Man, and the Messiah"), highly rhetorical products without a fine sense of form. The conflict between him and the symbolist Welhaven was not caused only by æsthetic antagonism; rather, fundamentally, by the question in which of the two directions Norwegian culture was to be furthered. Welhaven was the leader of the so-called "Intellectuals." His party took the ground that the culture of Norway should develop from the premises that existed; its present state of culture had been evolved in the union with Denmark, and it would be more than folly to sacrifice, beside much further gain from the same source, the connection with general European culture which the union with Denmark had opened up. In a beautiful set of sonnets, *Norges Damring* (1834), he scouted the onesidedness of the "patriots," contending that intellectual life cannot be made to spring from



nothing. But this set of poems was received by the opposition as a traitorous manifesto. One of Welhaven's nearest spiritual kinsmen was Andreas Munch (1811-1884). Undeniably, Ibsen was very strongly influenced by these tendencies.

Certainly the "Ultra-Norwegianists" were then still lacking a sound basis for their separatistic endeavors. At any rate, a beginning was made about that time in laying a proper foundation for a national literature. Peter Christian Asbjørnsen (1812-1885), a forester by profession, and Bishop Jørgen Moe (1813-1882) performed for their country the same service that the brothers Grimm performed for Germany. By their intelligent perseverance a great wealth of ancient tales and sagas was conserved without a perceptible loss of their popular tone and flavor. Asbjørnsen's *Norske Huldre-eventyr og Folkesagn* became for Ibsen's early poetry a source and influence of invaluable importance; the same was undoubtedly true of other collections inspired by these two pioneers. Foremost to be named among such collectors of songs and folklore are Magnus Brostrup Landstad (1802-1880) and Sophus Elseus Bugge (1833-1867).

The progress of the literary revival was at first rather slow. Here again the same is true of Scandinavia as a whole. For our own era Søren Aaby Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Denmark's greatest thinker, was the first Scandinavian of some European importance. What enormous advance comes forcibly to one's mind as one thinks of the many Scandinavian names that must be included among the principal writers of the present! Beside Ibsen and Bjørnson there suggest themselves at once spontaneously

the names of Selma Lagerlöf, Jonas Lie, J. P. Jacobsen, Alexander Strindberg, George and Edvard Brandes, Alexander Kielland, Arne Garborg, Hermann Bang, Knut Hamsun, and a host of others. It goes without saying that this memorable rise of the æsthetic faculties was coextensive with a general intellectual, social, and political growth.<sup>b</sup> So far as regards Norway in particular, her reconstitution as a separate wholly autonomous commonwealth under a self-chosen dynasty (1905), after an almost century-old union with Sweden, bespeaks irrefutably the vitality of her long-harbored political aspirations. Equally, the final world-wide recognition of Henrik Ibsen, being simultaneous with the national ascendancy, betokens the little country's valid claim to international prestige in the realm of thought and art.

Out of their "night of four centuries," then, the Norwegians have apparently arisen a wide-awake people, well rested for the upbuilding work of the day. They are seen to display a sort of unfagged vigor in coping with the problems peculiar to our era. Ibsen applies to them, though in a derogatory sense, the sobriquet "Yankees of the Old World," and the name fits them more closely certainly than it fits the inhabitants of Prussia or even of Holland, on whom one hears it occasionally bestowed. For in Norway the free processes of opinion are not so much embarrassed as in those other lands by the force of memories; the break-up of traditions is not so much inhibited by a sense of piety. Hence the people's surprising readiness to readjust by radical changes their social and civic machinery, as when early in the past century the titles and privileges of noble birth were at one stroke

abolished. In one of the greatest issues of democracy, Norway has led the van by her consistent course of extending the civic rights and liberties of the citizen and providing for a direct mode of all national and territorial elections. Norway has also been foremost to improve the civic status of woman, both before the civil law and through the enactment of female franchise. By the new statutes women take part in municipal elections under the same conditions of franchise as men. They are entitled to a direct vote from the age of twenty-five;<sup>3</sup> in order to exercise her franchise a woman must only be paying an income tax on the trifling annual income of three hundred (in the larger cities four hundred) kroner, which, however, her husband may pay in her name if they have property in common.

The Norwegians prove themselves in many other directions an energetic and progressive race. Since their intellectual life is unquestionably grounded with its main root in rationalism, theirs might be the danger of absorption in utilitarian interests. But from such philistinism they are saved by intellectual ambition of an uncommon order. Their utilitarianism is strongly tempered with a keen spiritual inquisitiveness. Nor are they destitute of high moral aspirations. In this combination of practical sense with idealism and emotional capacity the Norwegians present perhaps one of the purest and most clear-cut types of Teutonic race character.

However, the national physiognomy of the Norwegians is also beclouded by some rather shady features, and lest Ibsen's hostile attitude to his countrymen appear absurdly prejudiced, it should be remembered that their

energies were still in abeyance when he gained his first impressions. The national efficiency had not surged up to its proper level till some time after *The League of Youth* and *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* were written. The gradual steps of the inflexible policy of progress were not perceptible to the vision of the extremist. He saw only the detestable "Norwegian circumspection" which made him declare on one occasion that the object of these people was not to be men but — Englishmen! So Ibsen, never blessed with great patience or leniency, under the sting of experiences from which he never quite recovered, dwelt overmuch on the darker traits of his countrymen.

The attitudes of mind discerned by Ibsen as dominant in the Norwegian character are those depicted and satirized in *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*. They may be indicated as follows: In the first place, an overdevelopment of the critical faculties (as though this had not been Ibsen's own besetting fault!). This predisposition to approach every object with a withering analytical skepticism is too likely to paralyze the will power. It leads to halfheartedness in action, intolerance for the acts of others, and a prying suspicion constantly on the rampage. No very great safeguard lies in the supposable compensation for this defect, the Norwegians' alleged love of truth. For its effect is neutralized by indiscretion, extremism, and a lacking sense of proportion; the torch of truth works mischief in the hands of cranks and fanatics. In the second place, Ibsen finds as an unexpected logical corollary of hypercriticism and fanatical veracity, and at the same time a saving antidote against these, the widespread existence of national self-satisfaction; that same smug,

squat complacency, by the way, against which that other great Norwegian, Bjørnstjerne Björnson (1832-1910), raises his voice in *The Fishermayden*. All traits and things Norwegian, be they never so undesirable or outright unworthy, are respected as though they were invaluable national assets. The self-infatuation is no doubt fostered by the geographical isolation of the country and the smallness of its towns,—although the phenomenon is not necessarily unknown in very large and populous countries. Finally, between the uncritical and ultra-critical, the uncompromising and complaisant attitudes, public life would seem to be thrown into a state of perpetual moral evasion. And it is this fundamental untruthfulness of the public life that serves as the background of Ibsen's earlier dramas.

Henrik Ibsen, for his part, was placed by lineage as well as evolution beyond the limitations of the strictly national Norwegian temper, be that whatever it may. His own statement regarding his expanding sense of ethnological relationship is to this effect: "I believe that national consciousness is on the point of dying out, and that it will be replaced by racial consciousness: I myself, at least, have passed through this evolution. I began by feeling myself a Norwegian; I developed into a Scandinavian, and now I have arrived at Teutonism."<sup>1</sup> It is a declaration that will not startle anybody who has glanced at Ibsen's pedigree. The allegation that there flowed not a drop of pure Norwegian blood in Ibsen's veins may be left for experts in eugenics to settle to their satisfaction; but that there were German, Scotch, and Danish strains

<sup>1</sup> C, p. 420.



in his make-up, there can be no doubt; and the German element would seem to have predominated, since back of the parents we find, with but few exceptions, his forbears on both sides of the family to have been Germans. The enthusiastic acceptance of Ibsen by the Germans as a German seems therefore quite intelligible, and there is no need for the cry of "Ausländerei," i.e., predilection for things alien, which is still raised by provincially minded patriots against every recognition of foreign merit. A closer examination of records, in particular a study of the autobiographical material, reveals a fact not mentioned in that letter to Brandes, namely that Ibsen's pan-Scandinavian sympathies preceded, even as they followed, the narrower patriotic state of mind into which he fell for a brief spell under the influence of his friend Björnson. We have it from Ibsen as well as from other great men, that love of country is only a transition stage in the progress of ethics. His Scandinavianism turned scornfully against Norway when she left Denmark unaided in the clutches of the German foe. He could not bear the thought of living in his country after that. Prolonged residence in Germany softened his strong anti-German feelings. Germany's heroic struggle for unity elicited his increasing admiration, and the solidification of many puny governments into a magnificent world-power made him take confidence in the historic mission of the Empire. The effect was not unlike that produced on the great Swiss novelist Konrad Ferdinand Meyer (1825-1898), who till 1870 wavered in his spiritual allegiance between the French and the Germans.

In 1872, when the first German translations of his

works appeared, — *The Pretenders*, *Brand*, and *The League of Youth* all at once, — his change of mind towards Germany as a whole was completed; but Prussia he continued to hate, for annexing Schleswig-Holstein. Even his attitude towards Germany as a whole underwent several relapses, as when in a stirring poem, *Northern Signals* ("Nordens Signaler," September, 1872),<sup>1</sup> he invoked the spirits of the fallen Danes against Björnson's pan-Germanic agitation. But in 1875 he wrote a poem celebrating the German union, and in 1876, in the preface to the German edition of *The Vikings*, Ibsen himself discusses "unser gesamtgermanisches Leben," — our common Germanic existence. His feeling was changed. "The universality of the Germanic nature and the Germanic mind predestines it to a future empire of the world. My having been allowed to take part in these currents I clearly and deeply feel that I owe to my having entered into the life of German society."<sup>2</sup> He was deeply impressed with the triumphant force of German discipline. To this large racial ideal he remained true without any slavish repression of his personal instincts and judgments. In his sympathies more than one people was embraced. In fact he could not have made so amazing an appeal to the whole world, had he not become ultimately a citizen of the whole world.

No patriot was he. Both for Church and State  
A fruitless tree. But there, on the upland ridge,  
In the small circle where he saw his calling,  
There he was great, because he was himself.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *M*, vol. III, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> *SNL*, p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> *Peer Gynt*, vol. IV, p. 217.



It is very noteworthy how convincingly, yet without detriment to its cosmopolitan bearing, Ibsen's work reflects and echoes the life of his own, to us quite unfamiliar, home-land. The *données* of his plays are invariably Norwegian. In no single instance are his figures homeless, phantoms from a dreamer's no-man's land, though in their personal appearance and in their ways they do impress us as exotic. Ibsen's art, far from giving "to airy nothing a local habitation," worked from the life model. Now, his models came with few exceptions from crabbed social surroundings. It may be put down as a limitation of his craft that in the delineation of minor characteristics Ibsen could never get away from these quaint provincial patterns. To their origin the "strangeness" of his figures is chiefly due. Their peculiarity cannot be wholly accounted for except through what Mr. Arthur Balfour in his remarkable book *Foundations of Belief* calls the "psychologic climate." Ibsen had a keen sense of the importance of environment upon character, and since to the end of his days he sensed life under a local species, the fullest appreciation of such figures as Mortensgaard or Dr. Relling is hardly possible to those who do not know Norway. By the social background of his plays we are perpetually reminded that he came from a smallish country and that he had spent the formative portion of his life among men of small affairs in places where everybody knows everybody's business and respect for public opinion amounts mainly to fear of the neighbors' tongues. In this suburban atmosphere the social dramas of Ibsen are altogether steeped. In his book, *Zur Kritik der Moderne*, Hermann Bahr cleverly draws

this distinction: Ibsen's intellect is European, but his senses are Norwegian. Hence arises the anomaly of gigantic thoughts being evolved by pygmies, and of great questions being debated by petty bourgeois to whom they must be alien.

And just as this oppressive social environment with its petty interests, its local jealousies and envies, its bickerings and backbitings, is essential to a satisfactory understanding of Ibsen's people, so again the strictly natural setting of the locality, the Norwegian landscape, is inseparable from their meaning. In lifelong exile he remained a "Heimatkünstler." His works, fashioned in foreign lands and for Germans and Englishmen as much as for Scandinavians, are in outward seeming home-made and made for home consumption. The images of home were projected by the distance only the more vividly on his memory. Among the marble splendors of the ancient world, along the sunny stretches of the Roman Campagna, his inner eye wandered back over the wide expanse of the sea or over the bleak and icy mountains of the Northern land. Thus a cold but bracing air of regional reality blows through the structures reared by a detached cosmopolitan's fancy. A few of Ibsen's scenic directions may be set down to illustrate the point. In *The Lady from the Sea*, we have: Dr. Wangel's house, with a large veranda, on the left — a view of the fjords with high mountain ranges and peaks in the distance. In *Little Eyolf*: At the back a sheer cliff, an extensive view over the fjord. In *When We Dead Awaken*: At the back a view over the fjord, right out to sea, with headlands and small islands in the distance. In *The Vikings at Helgeland*: A rocky coast running precipi-

tously down to the sea at the back . . . Far out to the right the sea dotted with reefs and skerries on which the surf is running high. A still better example is furnished by the entire fourth act of *Peer Gynt*.

It is not without a biographical interest that Ibsen at one time longed to become a painter and that he wielded the brush rather insistently till about his thirtieth year. Records of these crude artistic efforts exist in the form of some rather hard and stiff landscapes composed in the "classic-romantic" method of that day. The Norwegian landscape also enters from the first into the obvious higher significance of his writings. Herein consists perhaps the most precious heritage to the poet from his country. From *Paa Vidderne* (1859-60),<sup>1</sup> the forerunner of *Brand*,<sup>c</sup> to the *Dramatic Epilogue*, the highland symbolizes the heroic or sublime aspects of life, the alpine peaks its visions splendid, as the lowland represents the commonplace. In *Love's Comedy*, for instance, the poet saves himself from philistinism by flight to the mountains. The outward phenomenon of nature is with Ibsen a symbol of inner truth. Life on the heights is ordained to be lonesome and forbidding, yet withal free, spacious, and salutary. It is well to remember that the scenic *motifs* are never fortuitous with Ibsen, but of a fixed and easily discernible importance. And this symbolistic propensity, which was practiced from the start, helps the student the better to understand the main stages in the poet's evolution, above all his early romanticism, vague, florid, and remote, which, having receded for a long while in favor of a firmer, clearer, but also colder and drier

<sup>1</sup> *M*, vol. III, pp. 42-54.

conception of life, was resumed later on so unmistakably with the lyric mood of his declining years. As early as 1857, in his essay on the *Kaempevisse* ("Hero-Song"),<sup>1</sup> Ibsen had declared: "The romantic view of life concedes to rationalism its *raison d'être* and its value, but alongside of it, beyond it, and clear through it passes the mystery, the puzzle, the miracle." The return to romanticism is clearly traceable in the technical changes of Ibsen's work. In the final stage of his career he was a devotee of symbolism surpassed among contemporaries only by his own disciple, Maurice Maeterlinck.

<sup>1</sup> *SW*, vol. I, pp. 337-60.

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY LIFE AND WORKS

THE life of Henrik Ibsen offers small yield to biographical hero-worship, for in its exterior aspects it was singularly uneventful, almost dull. The briefest and barest outline will have to suffice for our purposes. He was born on March 20, 1828, — in the same year with Tolstoy, — at Skien, a small town on the southeast coast of Norway, important only as a shipping-post for timber, and otherwise the very paradigm of a solemn, somnolent, and multifariously uninteresting country town; a typical home of all the mournful virtues of Philistia, and correspondingly replete with the meannesses and pretensions that are anatomized later on by the unsparing blade of Ibsen's satire. "Stockmanns Gaard," the house where little Henrik Johan gave his first shriek of indignation, was auspiciously surrounded by certain tenebrous institutions for the improvement and protection of society: the church, the public pillory, the jail, the madhouse, the Latin High School, etc.<sup>a</sup> Mr. Gosse warns the tourist that over this stern prospect he can no longer sentimentalize, for the whole of this part of Skien was burned down in 1886, "to the poet's unbridled satisfaction." "The inhabitants of Skien," he said with grim humor, "were quite unworthy to possess my birthplace."<sup>b</sup>

Reared in the affluence of a patrician household, he suffered an evil fall from fortune at the age of eight, when

his father lost nearly all of his property. From this time forth till he was well past the middle of his life he did not get out of the clutches of wretched, grinding poverty. His friend, Christopher Lorenz Due, gives the following picture of young Ibsen's destitute circumstances while at Grimstad: "He must have had an exceptionally strong constitution, for when his financial conditions compelled him to practice the most stringent economy, he tried to do without underclothing, and finally even without stockings. In these experiments he succeeded; and in winter he went without an overcoat." Embittered by his early struggle for existence, how could he escape a stern and sombre view of life? Vividly the grievous experience entered into his youthful poetry. In one of his earliest poems mankind is divided into favored guests blithely seated at the banquet of life, and miserable outsiders freezing in the street, condemned to look on through the window. Yet candid references to his childhood and adolescence, with their bitter disenchantments, are not in the manner of this taciturn poet.

His own desire to be sent to an art school abroad was not realizable, and at fifteen he was apprenticed to an apothecary at Grimstad. Here his life was still more penned up than before. But as the apothecary's shop in such towns serves as a favorite resort for the numerous male gossips and busybodies of the stamp of Mr. Daniel Heire (*The League of Youth*), it afforded the lad, over his pills and pestle, abundant opportunity for watching people in their amusing variety of tricks and manners. He practiced his satirical gift in many spiteful epigrams and lampoons on the worthy burghers. To the end of his



career he loved to spy out of a safe corner on the unwary, gloating over each unconscious self-revelation conveyed by speech and gesture, and hoarding it up in the iron safe of his memory for opportune use. The oft-drawn picture rises up, by force of association, of the aged dramatist seated with an air of impenetrable reserve and in perpetual silence in his chosen nook at the "Grand Café" in Christiania, his malicious little eyes, armored with gold-rimmed spectacles and masked behind an outspread news-sheet, leveled fixedly upon the tell-tale mirror on the opposite wall. As is the case with all great realists, he had an insatiable curiosity for trifles. This was abetted by extraordinary powers of observation. "He thought it amazing," so Mr. Gosse tells us,<sup>c</sup> "that people could go into a room and not notice the pattern of the carpet, the color of the curtains, the objects on the walls"; these being details which he could not help observing and retaining in his memory. This trait comes out in his copious and minute stage-directions and in his well-known insistence on the details of the setting. For instance, at the first Munich performance of *A Doll's House* he criticized the wall-paper of Helmer's living-room because it interfered with the "Stimmung." But in course of artistic experience he learned to be equally observant of the recondite peculiarities of men. He had a microscopical eye for human character. The grosser seizure of superficial traits was aided in his case by a closeness and accuracy of mind-reading comparable to the clairvoyancy of the great Russian novelist Dostojevsky (1821-1881). The pharmaceutical occupation had been chosen because it afforded Ibsen the future possibility of the

professional study of medicine. Arduous self-preparation for the university was resorted to in place of the regular schooling. In course of learning Latin, he was fired, by the reading of Cicero and Sallust, to a first creative effort; this resulted in the tragedy of *Catilina*. He went to Christiania in 1850, but failed in the entrance examination to the University. The raw pedagogical philosophy of the hour is free to point with grinning satisfaction to Ibsen's failure as an argument against the value of college entrance examinations. A safer inference would be Ibsen's unfitness for the learned professions. He clung obstinately, to the end of his life, to an unbookishness singular in a man of letters, and remained stubbornly incognizant of the works even of his greatest contemporaries, such as Tolstoy and Zola. In his intellectual interest everything else dwindled before the study of living human beings.

. In 1850 Ibsen's first play, *Kaempehöjen* ("The Warrior's Hill"), was brought before the public. He had now drifted into the precarious existence of a literary man. He became co-editor of an ephemeral revolutionary sheet which never reached a round hundred of subscribers, and this connection almost brought him behind prison bars in the period of reaction after the turbulent year of 1848. Some writers have wondered why to such a mere tyro at the theatrical business, a youngster of twenty-three without experience and without any tangible and properly certified attainments, there should have come all at once a call to leadership in a high and serious cause. Before the starveling Bohemian all at once the gates are flung open to a congenial career. Ole Bull calls him to the artistic

directorship of the newly founded "National Theatre" at Bergen (1851). As a matter of fact, the "National Theatre," in spite of its high-sounding name, was an extremely modest concern. The annual salary of about two hundred and fifty dollars attached to Ibsen's position indicates plainly enough the limited sphere of his dramaturgical activity. In Bergen he stayed till 1857. As a dramatic author he contributed to the national venture, besides *The Warrior's Hill*, the following works: in 1853, *St. John's Eve*; in 1856, *The Feast at Solhaug*; in 1857, a revised version of *Olaf Liljekrans*, this having been already sketched out in 1850. None of these juvenile exercises in playwriting is comparable to his first real drama, his parting gift to Bergen, *Lady Inger of Östraat* (1855).<sup>d</sup>

Ibsen's one lucky strike at Bergen was his marriage (1858) to Susannah Daae Thoresen, daughter of the rector and rural dean at Bergen. Mrs. Ibsen deserves a front place among the capable and long-suffering wives of men of genius.<sup>1</sup> Simply to have endured for full half a century the company of this exacting and exasperatingly unsocial creature bespeaks the calm endurance of a saint. But not only did she contrive to bear with the bluntnesses and edges of his character, she learned to make him happy, and stranger still, to be happy herself in the security of his captured affection.

From 1857 till 1862 Ibsen held successively at the two theatres of Christiania posts similar in responsibilities

<sup>1</sup> For a casual estimate by Ibsen of his wife cf. *C*, p. 199; also the poem *To the Only One*, of which a fine German translation by Ludwig Fulda is found in *SW*, vol. x, pp. 10-12.

and privations to that at Bergen. Certainly in this prolonged managerial connection with the theatre lies the chief explanation of his masterful stage-craft.<sup>6</sup>

In 1864 Ibsen shook the dust of Norway from his feet. The reasons will later be touched upon. After spending one month in Copenhagen, he journeyed direct to Rome. He lived there for a while, and elsewhere in Italy, then took up his residence in Germany (1868), living for the most part in Dresden and Munich, with further visits to the South, and regular annual flights to his favorite summer haunts in the Tyrol. The self-imposed exile during which he knew no permanent home and lived, practically, with his trunk always packed, lasted, with two short breaks, till 1891. Ibsen is the sole instance known to me of a writer of the first magnitude the bulk of whose literary work was produced in foreign parts.

The remainder of Ibsen's life was passed in the Norwegian capital, with the brief interruption of a journey in 1898. He died on May 23, 1906, in his seventy-ninth year. The latter portion of his life had brought him, after long and hard struggles, the gratification of every conceivable ambition: wealth, distinctions, ease, celebrity as the world's recognized chief dramatist, the allegiance of a younger generation of writers, and the well-nigh frenzied gratitude of a whole nation unanimous in calling him its first citizen. But the final years were darkly clouded. For six years the poet, now mentally infirm, had to endure the tragic fate of Oswald Alving, the curse of enforced inactivity.

Ibsen was a man of striking appearance notwithstanding his shortness of stature. On powerful shoulders rose

his leonine head, with a mane of recalcitrant white locks that framed an impressively high and broad-arched brow.<sup>1</sup> The face with its straight, compressed lips and piercing eyes revealed the whole man. He was taciturn and reserved, except with intimates; yet on occasion frank to the point of harshness; anything but good-natured, in fact rather querulous and occasionally a bit petulant.<sup>1</sup>

A brief survey of Ibsen's earliest works may help us to reach the beginnings of his slow but amazing development as an artist, and as a social thinker and critic. The works here classed as juvenile are now long dead and forgotten; their attempted resuscitation during the last decade was an act of piety on the part of enthusiasts, but they could not be redeemed for the stage. Still they are unquestionably of great interest for literary history, forming as they do a species of prelude of the lifework of a great poet. The most potent influence upon the conception and style of these dramas was that of the Danish poet Adam Öhlenschläger (1779-1850), leader of the romanticist movement in Scandinavia. Next to him the Norwegian prose writer Mauritz Ch. Hansen (1794-1842), also a romanticist, should be mentioned;<sup>2</sup> of foreign writers Schiller was the one most familiar to Ibsen at the earliest stage of his development.

It is not quite clear that Ibsen became fully conscious in his youth of the extraordinary poetic gifts that dwelt within him. Certainly the "lyric cry" was not overpoweringly strong in him. He never excelled as a song writer. In the epic *genre* the metrical story of *Terje Vigen*

<sup>1</sup> He gave an amusing exhibition of this trait while a member of the Scandinavian Society of Rome. Cf. *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, pp. 179-83.



(1860) <sup>1</sup> was his only noteworthy effort. His many prologues and other poems of occasion demonstrate, in the main, nothing more than an exceptional facility in the handling of verse and rime.<sup>h</sup>

In the narrative field he was practically unproductive. Of the projected novel *The Prisoner at Agershuus*, a mere shred of a beginning reached fruition.<sup>2</sup> For Ibsen, poetical material turned spontaneously into drama, as he himself informs us. "The inorganic comes first, then the organic. First dead nature, then living. The same obtains in art. When a subject first rises up in my mind I always want to make a story of it, — but it manages to grow into a drama."<sup>3</sup>

It is with Ibsen's plays that we are most concerned. As regards the early works of that kind, there is a certain negative quality, quite astonishing in the light of later development, which they have in common. They cling to accepted patterns. Ibsen's technical originality was relatively slow to develop. Without a knowledge of the earlier specimens of his art we might well speculate on the reason why such æsthetic Jacobinism as his could have been endured for a dozen years by the decorous bourgeois of Bergen and Christiania. But the fact is, Ibsen was by no means widely out of line with the use and wont of the theatre at this time, and so he created for himself no difficulties in his position by balking the public sentiment. He had not yet stepped from the leading strings of the then acknowledged masters of the drama. A survey of the repertory of the Norwegian Theatre of Christiania

<sup>1</sup> *M*, vol. III (*Digte*), pp. 61-71; *SW*, vol. I, pp. 69-82.

<sup>2</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, pp. 149-54.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.



under Ibsen's management is given in his annual Director's Report, for 1860-61. We gain an idea of the make-up of this repertory from the titles of the plays that were newly mounted during the period covered by the report: *The Wood Nymph's Home*, drama with song and dance; *Sword and Pigtail* ("Zopf und Schwert") by Gutzkow; *He drinks*, vaudeville; *A Dangerous Letter*, comedy; *A Speech*, vaudeville; *Pernille's Brief Singleness*, comedy; *The Folk of Gudbrandsdal*, drama, etc.<sup>1</sup>

Ibsen's first drama, *Catilina*, was never deemed worthy of actual performance. It was begun in the year of the great European uprising, 1848, finished in 1849, and published in 1850,<sup>2</sup> at the expense of a loyal friend and under the pen-name of "Brynjolf Bjarme"; the edition was eventually wasted, after a sale of some twenty copies more or less. The introduction to the second, greatly altered, edition (1875) reinforces the value of the work as a human document. Historical subjects were *de rigueur*, especially for budding dramatic geniuses. Ibsen's play is written for the most part in the conventional blank verse; the final portion is in rimes, each line running to from thirteen to fifteen syllables. The one thing at all remarkable in this crude treatment of a time-honored theme is the independent conception of the principal character. Ibsen wrote uninfluenced by and probably ignorant of his predecessors in the premises, from Ben Jonson to Alexandre Dumas *filis*, nor was he hampered by any attempt at unconditional adhesion to the "historical truth" of the story.

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, pp. 175-79; cf. also *SW*, vol. I, p. 290 f.

<sup>2</sup> The first version of *Catilina* is found in *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, pp. 231-316; the second version (1875) in *SW*, vol. I, pp. 537-628.

Those who agree with the assertion that Ibsen, throughout his diversified literary career, was above all things a "poet of ideas," that is, had for his chief purpose the ventilation of moral views and theories, will find valuable confirmation of the belief in the introduction to the play. It is in essence an avowal of an excess of intellectual intention. The young dramatist thinks it fair to apologize for having tampered with the characters, and pleads in extenuation his desire of giving unrestrained play to the central animating idea. He explains that his *Catiline* was not meant for a *hero* in the popular sense, but for a *personality*, and therefore had to be presented as an incarnate mixture of noble and base qualities. In fact, Ibsen's *Catiline* is widely removed from the sly, ambitious desperado of Cicero's rolling periods. Much nearer does he approach the Sallustian view of his character, — an anarchist, but from no ignoble impulse and not without a high patriotic aim. Mr. Haldane Macfall eloquently sums up his case: "An heroic *Catiline*, a majestic and vigorous soul, burning with enthusiasm for the great heroic past, horrified at the rottenness of his age, raising a revolt at the corrupt state, but too steeped in that rottenness himself to be able to save the age." ' Single-handed he resolves to clean out the Augean stable of society; but his power for good is perverted by the instability of his nature. His lack of equilibrium between will and capacity brings this figure into conspicuous kinship with many a wrecked Titan of earlier literature; yet closer still is his spiritual affinity with the half-baked overmen of innumerable recent German works, as Hauptmann's *Meister Heinrich*, to instance only one.

It is certainly noteworthy how early in his career Ibsen was fascinated by the virtue of self-reliance militantly advancing against the authority of state, church, and family. But at this stage he could not draw such characters from life as when he came to compose *An Enemy of the People* or *John Gabriel Borkman*. The female characters by their complete unrealness betray the novice hand, though they herald Ibsen's notorious division of his women into two distinct classes, namely, women controlled by their heart, and women controlled by their will. And here, too, at the very outset of Ibsen's dramatic career, we find his hero in the characteristic dilemma between two women of the different types. The same antithesis as here between the angelic Aurelia and the demonic Furia occurs with regularity in nearly all the later plays, as in *Lady Inger*, where Inger Gyldenlöve and her daughter Eline, in *The Vikings*, where Hjördis and Dagny, in *The Feast at Solhaug*, where Margit and Signe are placed in sharp juxtaposition.

The youthful plays are strongly under historical influence, but from Roman history the interest soon switches off to themes of a national Scandinavian provenience. The first which actually gained a momentary foothold on the stage was the one-act play entitled *The Hero's Mound* ("Kaempehöjen," 1851). It was the *rifacimento* of *The Norsemen* ("Normannerne"), written in 1849. Ibsen justly held this play in low opinion and would not consent to its being included in the complete edition of his works.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> After Ibsen's death, however, it was made accessible through the publication of the *Efterladte Skrifter*, by Koht and Elias; cf. also *SW*, vol. II, pp. 1-33.

Yet it shows a certain fitness for the theatre sadly absent in *Catilina*. The manuscript of this short dramatic sketch having been irrecoverably lost, likewise the serial reprint of it in a newspaper of 1854, the prompting copy preserved in the library of the theatre at Bergen has had to serve Ibsen's latest editors in lieu of a more authentic original. The playlet was written in blank verse, with several lyrics interspersed. Originally the scene was laid in Normandy, but later it was moved to Sicily. The time is shortly before the Christianization of the Norwegians. And the fundamental idea was to show how the civilization of the period moved up from the South to the North. The heroine, Blanka, in the restraining influence exercised by her goodness and virtue on the barbarians, seems reminiscent of Goethe's Iphigenia. The tone is decidedly romantic, and both in the conception and the phrasing there is to be observed along with a pronounced lack of individual style an almost slavish imitation of the manner of Adam Öhlenschläger. Obviously Ibsen was now kindled with enthusiasm for the past of his native land. This is not the only time that an expedition of Vikings forms the theme of a drama by Ibsen. In order to understand the range of his images and ideas it should be borne in mind that modern Dano-Norwegian poetry derives its themes mainly from three sources, so far as it does not deal explicitly with contemporary or with historical subjects. The sources are the Eddas and Sagas, the ancient folk-songs, and finally the works of the great Danish dramatist Ludwig Holberg (1684-1754). To the Bergen period belongs furthermore *The Night of St. John* ("Sankthansnatten"), a fairy

play in three acts dating from 1852 (played 1853).<sup>1</sup> In craftsmanship it shows no material advance. On the stage it proved a flat failure, and but for the rescuing hands of the editors of the posthumous works it would have remained in the oblivion to which its author had consigned it. The story bears a popular character and is full of good ideas, but is clumsily executed. An outline of the plot will serve a use by pointing to the contrast between Ibsen's crude beginnings and his subsequent mastery. The content, it will be observed, is national, but the technique is palpably French, in accordance with the contemporary fashion in drama. Ibsen's chief guiding star at Bergen and Christiania seems to have been Scribe, as appears especially from the technical construction of *Love's Comedy*. But his own independent manner is already discernible in certain features of *The Night of St. John*, notably in that favorite contrivance of his, the unveiling of a past family secret for the denouement of the plot, used so effectively in *Lady Inger*, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm*, etc. In later plays several of the dramatic concepts of *The Night of St. John* are repeated to better advantage. The resemblance of its fantastic romanticism to *Peer Gynt* is self-evident. The play introduces Mrs. Berg, her daughter Juliane, a son, and a stepdaughter Anne, a sweet poetic soul thought to be unbalanced because of her fantastic imagination and belief in elves and trolls. Juliane is affianced to the impecunious student Johannes Birk, who falls in love with Anne. Young Berg brings his friend Paulsen home with him. The latter and Juliane fall promptly in love. On

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, pp. 355-428.



the festal night of St. John the young people stroll to a woody hill in order to enjoy the bonfires. A magic potion mixed with the holiday punch makes the region seem enchanted. The hillside bursts open and discloses to their view the Mountain King with his gnomes and sprites. But this and the ensuing witchery is experienced only by two of the young people, Johannes and Anne, thanks to their capacity for deeper feelings.<sup>1</sup> The young "poet" Paulsen and the sentimental doll Juliane see none of it. The ill-assorted couple Juliane and Johannes dissolve their engagement. In the final winding-up Birk marries Anne and Juliane takes the æsthetic *poseur* Paulsen, a fore-runner of Stensgaard in *The League of Youth*. The meagre little play, with its naïve fable which belongs in a class with the *White Grouse of Justedal*,<sup>1</sup> harks back to an earlier inspiration perhaps than any other of Ibsen's works. For in the reminiscences of his school days, while speaking of the gay social doings of the little town, Ibsen dwells particularly on the joyous celebration of St. John's Night, when the general merriment was apt to grow boisterous, and good-natured pranks would be indulged in with a fair degree of impunity.

<sup>1</sup> *SW<sup>II</sup>*, vol. I, pp. 319-54.



## CHAPTER III

### HISTORY AND ROMANCE

THE first hint of extraordinary dramatic force is contained in his next play, *Lady Inger of Östraat* ("Fru Inger til Östraat," 1855). Work on this historical tragedy started at Bergen, in 1854; on January 2 of the following year it was performed there for the first time. A few copies were printed in 1857, and a somewhat revised edition, with an interesting preface, came out in 1874. The influence of German romanticism is quickly discovered in this tragedy; quite in line with it is the lavish use of balladistic notions and phrases. More than enough has perhaps been said about the mechanical adjustment of this play to the demands of the regnant school of the drama. But *Lady Inger* is just Ibsen's first "well-made" piece, not by any means his last or only one. Not till the beginning of his middle period does he free himself from that governing influence whose hold upon him is unquestioned up to the last act of *A Doll's House*. In all these plays, then, not merely in *Lady Inger*, must we expect to find and do in fact find superabundance of external incident, plots teeming with complications and surprises, and a pertinacious use of "telling" entrances and effective curtains. In *Lady Inger* the intricacies are so great as to interfere with the intelligibility of the dramatic process; the mind of the spectator is hopelessly confused by the continual *quid pro quos* and cross-purposes which a mere reader of the play

may reason out at his leisure. And surely it is our curiosity and excitement that wax from scene to scene rather than our human sympathy, as should be the case in true drama. Even the vice of ranting might be charged here against a poet who in his later course abstained severely from rhetorical invective. To make full the measure of his sins against art, Ibsen manipulated the plot in a decidedly sensational manner. The intrigue is far-fetched, the catastrophe — a mother causing her own son to be slain, through ignorance of his identity — harrowing rather than tragical, because it lacks a sound psychological foundation.

Yet with all these manifest imperfections we can date from *Lady Inger of Östraat* a prophetic advance in one domain of dramaturgy, namely, in the art of character painting. *Lady Inger* is unquestionably Ibsen's first great tragedy of character, properly speaking. Two masterly figures, created by the poet's imagination, are shown in play and counterplay, each bent upon overmatching the other: Inger, the mother torn betwixt love for her child and her land, a woman of masculine temper and giant force of will; and Nils Lykke, the Danish knight, wily master of politics, ruthless and irresistible vanquisher of women. It is diamond cut diamond. Ibsen wove only the background of this drama from historical material, his object being to throw into strong relief a private, not a political, tragedy. He did his utmost, so he tells us,<sup>1</sup> to familiarize himself with the manners and customs, with the thoughts and feelings, and also the language of the men of those days. Against the hopeless national decay

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I, p. 189; *SW*, vol. II, pp. 152-53.

at the beginning of the sixteenth century he makes his heroine stand forth, "the greatest personage of her day," in tragical moral grandeur far surpassing the historic Fru Inger Gyldenløve. The author's sentiment is frankly nationalistic, his argument pointed against Denmark. A woman can frighten that rotten state, and is only prevented from her patriotic purpose by the plight of her child in the hands of the enemy. The personal characters and fates make no pretense of being authentic. Personalities are freely transformed or invented, as for instance, Eline Gyldenløve, a fascinating girl, proud and self-possessed, yet capable of passionate self-abandonment. In their psychological foundations they are rightfully modernized, for what, indeed, could be a Hecuba to us in her stark historic impersonality? Thus *Lady Inger* harbors a presage of the coming social tragedies, made more emphatic by the fact that this play, contrary to the traditions and conventions, was composed in prose.

Despite this foreshowing of a realistic tendency, Ibsen's genius continues to travel in the romantic direction. His next play was called *The Feast at Solhaug* ("Gildet paa Solhaug," 1856). It was written in the summer of 1855 and saw the footlights in 1856 on the second day of January, like all of Ibsen's Bergen plays, since on that day the founding of the theatre was commemorated.<sup>a</sup> About the same time it was published and accorded a very warm reception both by the audiences and readers. It is far less gloomy than *Lady Inger*. It is even, on the whole, written in a genial mood, as cheerful as it ever lay in Ibsen's power to be. A comedy, however, it is not, — rather an attempt at a "Schauspiel" of a quasi-lyrical order. Either

for this reason or perhaps because he found it more difficult at this time to handle prose than verse in drama of the lighter *genre*, Ibsen returned to verse, but aside from a fairly normal recurrence of four beats to the line the metre is extremely varied and irregular. In artistic merit the new play dropped behind *Lady Inger*. In fact, *The Feast at Solhaug* was one of a few achievements of his "Lehrjahre" which Ibsen explicitly disowned, for a while at least, and which he never acknowledged to be in any degree representative of his ability.

From the author's preface to the second edition (1883) may be gathered valuable information in regard to the genesis of this play and its import for the trend of Ibsen's artistic progress. His statement is here given with some abridgments.

In 1854 I had written *Lady Inger of Östraat*. This was a task which had obliged me to devote much attention to the literature and history of Norway during the Middle Ages. . . . The period, however, does not present much material suitable for dramatic treatment. Consequently I soon deserted it for the saga period. But the sagas of the kings did not attract me greatly; at that time I was unable to put the quarrels between kings and chieftains, parties and clans, to any dramatic purpose. This was to happen later. In the Icelandic "family" sagas, on the other hand, I found in abundance the human material required for the moods, conceptions, and thoughts which at that time occupied me, or were, at least, more or less distinctly present in my mind. . . . In the pages of these family chronicles, with their variety of scenes and of relations between man and man, between woman and woman, in short, between human beings, I met a personal, eventful, really vital existence; and as the result of my intercourse with all these distinctly individual men and women, there presented themselves to my mind's eye the first rough,

indistinct outlines of *The Vikings at Helgeland*. Various obstacles intervened. . . . My mood of the moment was more in harmony with the literary romanticism of the Middle Ages than with the deeds of the sagas, with poetical than with prose composition, with the word-melody of the ballad than with the characterization of the saga. Thus it happened that the fermenting, formless design for the tragedy, *The Vikings at Helgeland*, transformed itself temporarily into the lyric drama, *The Feast at Solhaug*.<sup>1</sup>

The shifting of his interest from the sagas to the ballads was quickened by the impression received from the study of M. B. Landstad's collection of Norwegian folksongs.<sup>b</sup> Ibsen points out in the concluding paragraph of the preface, how under those circumstances the female principals of the Viking tragedy, that was already maturing in his mind, spontaneously transformed themselves into the sisters Margit and Signe of the other nascent drama; how Sigurd, the seafaring hero, changed into the knightly minstrel Gudmund Alfson, whose relation to the two sisters is much the same as that of Sigurd to Hjördis and Dagny. The writer ends with the following emphatic declaration:—

The play under consideration, *The Feast at Solhaug*, like all my other dramatic works, is an inevitable outcome of the tenor of my life at a certain period. It had its origin within and was not the result of any outward impression or influence.

The resemblance of the plot to *The Vikings* springs into prominence upon a closer comparison than would here be in place. The dramatic conflict is brought on by the visit of Gudmund, after long absence, to the house of Bengt, to whom Margit is bound in unhappy marriage. Her love

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I, pp. 183-92.



for the playmate of her youth is violently awakened, but his love now turns toward the younger sister. Margit's attempt against her husband is stayed by the hand of a gracious fate, which also sets her free by making her a widow. Signe and Gudmund join hands while Margit retires to a nunnery.

In order of his works the satirical comedy *Norma, or The Love of a Politician* ("Norma, eller En Politikers Kjaerlighed")<sup>1</sup> followed next. It is called a musical tragedy in three acts, but is in fact nothing more than a brief political skit in the guise of a libretto.

*Olaf Liljekrans* (1857) had been roughly sketched in 1850, under a different title, before Ibsen had completed his twenty-second year, but was not finished until six years afterward. It, too, was written in verse, imitating the measures of the ancient heroic ballads for whose rugged stride and swing Ibsen at this time cherished a great liking. It is, however, one of Ibsen's least successful dramas.<sup>2</sup> The strong national-historic bent of the piece, whose ultimate version was called for the hero of one of the most famous of the Kaempeviser, was already indicated in the designation of "national drama" which Ibsen bestowed on the earlier version. This torso, lately published by the literary executors of the poet, bears the title *The White Grouse of Justedal* ("Justedalsrypa").<sup>2</sup> It consists of about one act and a half, all that was written of the four acts intended. The dialogue is mixed of verse and

<sup>1</sup> *Efterladte Skrifter*, vol. I, pp. 76-86; *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, pp. 21-31.

<sup>2</sup> *Rypen i Justedal, Efterl. Skr.*, vol. I, pp. 339 ff. In German: *Das Schneehuhn in Justedalen*. National-Schauspiel in vier Akten von Brynjolf Bjarme. 1850. *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, pp. 319-53. (The same pen-name was used in *Catilina*.)



prose. But the theme was realized once more under the abridged title *The Wild Bird* ("Fjeldfuglen," 1859), "a romantic opera in three acts by Henrik Ibsen."<sup>1</sup> Only a brief fragment of this libretto is preserved. The action of *The White Grouse*, as well as of *Olaf Liljekrans*, is out and out romantic in its conception. The hackneyed theme of the hostile brothers is utilized for the previous history of the characters. A masterful personality is introduced in the old yeoman Bengt, who is pursued by a guilt-laden conscience because he has evilly contrived the disinheritance of his elder brother. The latter, with his wife, has gone into exile and passed out of the story. Bengt's son, Björn, by his father's wish is to marry Merete for her property, but she is in love with young farmer Einar. Björn for his part meets and loves a wonderful maiden named Alfild, an orphan dwelling in solitude amidst the beauties of nature, on terms of wondrous familiarity with the flowers and creatures of the woods. But one human being has she seen since her parents died: an aged minstrel of wonderful skill. Woe to the house that does not bid him welcome. Alfild, of course, is the daughter of the lost Alf. The winding-up of the story is easily divined.

*The Vikings in Helgeland* ("Haermaendene paa Helgeland," 1858) was published after being rejected by leading Scandinavian theatres. Under Ibsen's management it was given at Christiania, November 24, 1858. The leading theatres in the Scandinavian countries first opened to this play in 1875, and only after Ibsen's social problem

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. II, pp. 3-24. It was to be set to music by Udbye. In the list of *dramatis personæ* occurs Thorgejr, a minstrel who reappears in *The Pretenders*.

plays had compelled international attention was this heroic drama given an occasional trial abroad. In Berlin it was staged in 1890. Before that, the great Viennese tragédienne, Charlotte Wolter, had triumphantly impersonated the part of Hjördis by virtue of her conquering vehemence of temper, whereas Ellen Terry appears to have scored barely a *succès d'estime* for her more moderated performance of the part.

Critical opinion of the play runs the wide gamut from "sorry failure" to "superb achievement." Whether or no the latter estimate is extravagant, Mr. Archer's statement that *The Vikings* forms a cornerstone of modern Norwegian literature, along with Björnson's peasant idyll *Synnöve Solbakken*, is not to be gainsaid. Ibsen began his tragedy under the then reigning Helleno-romantic influence; of course he started out in verse, in writing which he had by this time acquired an extraordinary facility. Fortunately he discerned very soon a far fitter vehicle for his poetical intentions in colloquial prose of old-time simplicity and quaintness, which aided the imagination in reconstructing the temporal environment of the plot. His diction then readily took on the ancient flavor of the Icelandic family sagas that had suggested the theme.<sup>d</sup> The adoption of prose was by no means a meretricious device for smoother sailing and quicker arrival, as some foolish people have been misled into thinking. And here he takes the decisive turn to a new mode of dramatic expression, that realistic terseness of an unadorned, almost naked prose dialogue, which he eventually domiciled on the stage. *The Vikings* is a singular adaptation of the Sigfrid saga. Its substance derives from the Volsung saga, but, so Ibsen

emphatically declares, only in part. He says, most significantly, "More essentially my poem may be said to be founded upon the various Icelandic family sagas (recorded in the thirteenth century), in which it often seems that the titanic conditions and occurrences of the *Nibelungenlied* and the Volsung saga have simply been reduced to human dimensions."<sup>1</sup> To the form he had given much study, as is evidenced by his essay on the heroic ballad, mentioned before. He shared at this time, and much later too, the prevalent view about the indispensability of the lyric element in drama: "If the poet is to extract a dramatic work from this epic material [meaning the sagas], he must necessarily bring into it a foreign, a lyrical element; for the drama is well known to be a higher blending of the lyric and the epic."<sup>2</sup> He swerved from the sagas to the ballad because in the latter the lyric material is present, whereas it has to be artificially imported in the former.

From the countless modern versions of the story of Sigfrid or Sigurd and the Nibelungs, *The Vikings in Helgeland* differs essentially in the treatment. The dramatic possibilities of the old epic were too obvious not to have been exploited often before. In Germany, Friedrich Hebbel did most justice to the theme, some time after Ibsen. It was he who defined his task in dramatizing the *Nibelungenlied* as consisting simply in stripping the ancient epic of its nondramatic, i.e., specifically epic and lyric<sup>e</sup> accessories. Hebbel, too, perceived with a true dramatist's insight that the mythological apparatus of the saga, no matter how great may be its intrinsic worth and value, is

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II, pp. xi-xii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. ix-x.

irrelevant to the tragic force of the purely human story; that consequently all the fabulous paraphernalia, dwarfs and dragons, magic hoods and rings and cinctures, can be spared without detriment to the dramatic effect. Nevertheless he was unwilling to abandon the fabulous elements for fear of losing touch with the fixed popular predilection for the theme; so the marvelous strains are saved, not in the ground melody, however, but in the accompaniment.

Ibsen went much further. Like Hebbel, he descried in the ancient tale a most attractive subject for a drama; but he gave short shrift to all its extra-natural features, and reduced the tragedy to purely human terms. By the blending of material and additions of his own the story was altered almost beyond recognition. The result is virtually a new story, but with a striking inner resemblance to the old, due to a close analogy of *motifs*. Ibsen's experiment was an extremely daring one: he did not really dramatize either the *Nibelungenlied* or the Scandinavian legends about Sigurd the Volsung. His play bodies forth the fates and actions of mere men and women, not of demons and demigods. It expresses generally an emotional life much like our own, only a degree ruder, more elemental, in consonance with the character of early Teutonic existence. The primitive flavor is religiously preserved. In its particulars the story had to be materially altered by piecing together matters originally disconnected, to account for everything by natural means. To illustrate the transformation: the legendary Sigurd breaks, by miraculous feats of valor, the ban put upon the Valkyrie Brynhild, and by means of magic deception wins her for King Gunther.

In Ibsen's play Sigurd conquers Hjördis after slaying her sentinel, a bear of formidable strength, a deed represented as extremely difficult, to be sure, yet entirely within the possibilities of exceptional valiancy; the ensuing deception of Hjördis is rendered feasible by the darkness of the night. All the wonders of the saga were excised, root and branch, with one sole exception, — when Hjördis hears the "Aasgardsreien," i.e., the ride of the battle-felled warriors to Valhal, and makes ready to join it, — and even for this a natural explanation could be invented at a pinch. Then, too, the social level of the play's persons is considerably lowered. Gunnar, unscrupulously divested of his royal dignity, appears in the character of a rich yeoman. One almost wonders why he, as well as Sigurd, has been allowed to retain his name, whereas the female principals, Brynhild and Kriemhild (Guthrun), have been renamed Hjördis and Dagny. Ibsen may have held to those names in order to indicate the provenience of the theme.

Having resolutely deviated from the ancient story, the poet was free to go his own ways in the delineation of character. Yet, here, instead of fully availing himself of his freedom, he follows, in the main, the trail of tradition. Thus, in view of their rather fixed psychology, the actions of the persons do not always fit their changed conditions and circumstances. The entire tragic crisis and catastrophe arise out of Sigurd's guilty act — the lie conspired between him and Gunnar. But in this rendering Sigurd's intercession for his friend is both unintelligible and unintelligent, through the absence of any good reason, such as exists in the ancient versions, why Sigurd should not win



the loved woman for himself. The significant thing, however, is that at the root of the human tragedy we are shown by the poet here, for the first time, the lie as the destroyer of happiness.

Throughout the action all the figures have a stationary aspect. They are not so much individuals as types, like roughly carved figures in a game of chess, each assessed with an immutable value. Hardly a trace is here revealed of the poet's amazing art of individualization. Nevertheless he was going forward in the right path, in quest of a new style for the drama. Perhaps the diction is as crude and clumsy as is the drawing of the characters. Yet it struggles visibly, and not unsuccessfully, away from the sonorous and grandiloquent declamation in general use for the higher drama of the time. Ibsen had doubtless chastened his diction through his favorite reading, the Scripture and the sagas. Yet *The Vikings* marks only his first perceptible advance in the new direction; he did not definitely cast off the older rhetorical manner till after *Pillars of Society*. The principal advance in *The Vikings* is along constructive lines. In this respect the play leaves very little to be desired. The composition, indeed, is masterly. In a perfectly logical manner each act rears itself to a climax so spontaneous that, notwithstanding our foreknowledge of the occurrences, the interest is held in breathless suspense from start to finish. Also a certain proficiency in that laconic brevity in which Ibsen later on excelled is here noticeable for the first time. It is attained by an extremely dexterous proportioning between articulate and smothered expression; that is, by winnowing out all unessential details without omitting anything that



actually contributes to the comprehension of the source and course of the tragedy.

In the management of the dramatic mechanism a still greater progress is to be noted in the play with which Ibsen next began to occupy himself and in which the archaistic style was again used. It is this play, *The Pretenders*, that launched Ibsen safely on the career of a world-poet, while yet his own compatriots were blinded by their dense suburbanism to the justice of his claims at home. As its completion, however, was preceded by that of *Love's Comedy* ("Kærlighedens Komædie," 1862), a chronologically ordered review has to record a temporary artistic retrogression. This opinion is offered, however, in full recognition of the symptomatic portend of the *Comedy*. For it is unquestionably the first of Ibsen's dramatic treatises on social philosophy. "*Love's Comedy*," says Ibsen, "is the forerunner of *Brand*; for in it I have represented the contrast in our state of society between the actual and the ideal in all that relates to love and marriage."<sup>1</sup> The comparison with *Brand*, not at once discernible, is quite apposite. For in this comedy Ibsen draws for the first time the extreme consequences of moral and intellectual consistency in its combat with the universal social sham. For the first time, too, he gives free rein to his characteristically bellicose disposition. An earlier attempt of the theme was made in 1860 under the title *Svanhild*.<sup>2</sup> The idea of the play, undoubtedly inspired by Schopenhauer's belief that love is a delusion and his cynical assertion that nature throws it as a mere sop to mankind in order to secure her object, procreation, might be expressed in the

<sup>1</sup> C, pp. 123 and 237.

<sup>2</sup> SWII, vol. II, pp. 25-43.

form of a cynical syllogism: Marriage, a social necessity, is sure death to love. Nothing is more grievous than disillusionment in love. Ergo, only a conventional marriage can be happy. And the double-barreled moral is this: If you are in love, do not marry; if you want to marry, be sure you are not moved by love. Consequently, if a poet would trace love's true course, he might do worse than go by the directions of his colleague, Falk, in *Love's Comedy*.

You're aware,  
No curtain falls but on a plighted pair.  
Thus with the Trilogy's First Part we've reckoned;  
The Comedy of Troth-plight, Part the Second,  
Thro' five insipid Acts he has to spin,  
And of that staple, finally, compose  
Part Third, — or Wedlock's Tragedy, in prose.<sup>1</sup>

The satire turns a direct shaft of white light on the fulcrum of the social apparatus. Ibsen finds that the trouble with marriage is fundamental levity, and has the courage to proclaim his discovery. The comedy, then, is at bottom very serious. Hence the outburst of indignation with which it was received. "The sting," says Professor C. H. Herford in introducing his translation, "lay in the unflattering veracity of the piece as a whole; in the merciless portrayal of the trivialities of persons, or classes, high in their own esteem; in the unexampled effrontery of bringing a clergyman upon the stage."<sup>2</sup>

The unflagging idealist, Falk, in this play speaks frankly for the poet fired with a holy purpose.

Right in the midst of men the Church is founded,  
Where Truth's appealing clarion must be sounded.  
We are not called, like demigods, to gaze on  
The battle from the far-off mountain crest,

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I, p. 328.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxxix.

But in our hearts to bear our fiery blazon,  
 An Olaf's cross upon a mailed breast,  
 To look afar across the fields of flight,  
 Tho' pent within the mazes of its might,  
 Beyond the mirk descry one glimmer still  
 Of glory — that's the call we must fulfill.<sup>1</sup>

To the fulfillment of this call to a noble mission marriage as a rule is antagonistic. A case in point is the divinity-student Lind, erstwhile dedicating his future to missionary labors in foreign parts, yet ready, so soon as he is betrothed, to nullify in a moment the higher ambition and to become a poky pedagogue at home, for the sake of bread and butter for two mouths and more.

To fulfill the "call," the superior individual must perforce "break from men, stand free, alone"; it is astonishing how clearly the fugue of Ibsen's social ideas is fore-sounded in the comedy.

My four-wall-chamber poetry is done;  
 My verse shall live in forest and in field,  
 I'll fight under the splendor of the sun,  
*I or the Lie — one of us two must yield.*<sup>2</sup>

The greatest help to the man of heroic moral calibre comes ever from the obstinate courage of a woman like Svanhild: —

If you make war on lies, I stand  
 A trusty armor-bearer by your side.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, a danger lurks in chivalry — witness Don Quixote, — one may become a monomaniac on almost any subject; truth may become an obsession instead of a cause. The intractable Falk goes his own inexorable way, but

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I, p. 404.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 405.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 404.

with whom are we to sympathize when he meets Parson Strawman's objection: —

Even though you crush another's happiness ?

with smiling nonchalance: —

I plant the flower of knowledge in its place.<sup>1</sup>

Involuntarily the thought wanders to Gregers Werle, the meddlesome peddler of truth, in *The Wild Duck*. Was Plato so very wrong in wanting to banish the poet from his republic?

Falk and Svanhild are two ideal natures attracted by a profounder, more unworldly love than is known to the Strawmans and Linds and Stivers, and drawn apart again by fear of their love being cheapened in the mart of experience. If Love is to conserve its uplifting power, it must first have paled into a memory. The seemingly paradoxical moral of *Love's Comedy* is that if you want to keep love alive it behooves you to sacrifice it at its culminating point.

*Falk.*

But — to sever thus!

Now, when the portals of the world stand wide, —

When the blue spring is bending over us,

On the same day that plighted thee my bride!

*Svanhild.* Just therefore must we part. Our joys' torch-fire

Will from this moment wane till it expire!

And when at last our worldly days are spent,

And face to face with our great Judge we stand,

And, as a righteous God, he shall demand

Of us the earthly treasure that he lent —

Then, Falk, we cry, past power of Grace to save —

"O Lord, we lost it going to the grave!"

*Falk (with strong resolve).* Pluck off the ring!

*Svanhild (with fire).* Wilt thou?

<sup>1</sup> Vol. 1, p. 418.

*Falk.* Now I divine!

Thus and no otherwise canst thou be mine!  
 As the grave opens into Life's Dawn-fire,  
 So Love with Life may not espoused be  
 Till, loosed from longing and from wild desire,  
 It soars into the heaven of memory!

*Svanhild.* Now for this earthly life I have foregone thee, —  
 But for the life eternal I have won thee!<sup>1</sup>

To what extent the wrathful condemnation of *Love's Comedy* was merited it would be idle to discuss. So much is certain, that it was not prompted by artistic idiosyncrasies, but was almost wholly due to bitter personal resentment. An author must not expect to fall foul of people's fixed notions and pet prejudices with impunity; least of all when not even a visible minority is ripe for enlightened views. So Ibsen had brought a hornet's nest about his ears. The Norwegian public was shocked beyond measure. Instantly whole handfuls of fingers of scorn were pointed at Ibsen's domestic affairs, — the play had been begun in the early period of his marriage, — which were misrepresented in such a light that if true they would have made any man turn pessimist. Are not even the *illuminati* apt to blur the nice distinction between a poet's personal and his vicarious experience?

A much-discerning Public hold  
 The singer generally sings  
 Of personal and private things,  
 And prints and sells his past for gold.<sup>2</sup>

The difference between "erleben" and "durchleben," in which for Ibsen consisted the very criterion of his poetic activity,<sup>2</sup> was utterly missed. Wholly impercipient of

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I, p. 451. All the above translations are by C. H. Herford.

<sup>2</sup> C, p. 190; but in the translation the point is not well brought out.

the new literary values that ran in the trenchant lines of the comedy, the critics saw in it only a libelous infraction of the unquestioned all-rightness of the use and wont. Scandal, distress, and ostracism were the immediate and inevitable fruitage of the poet's labor. His social excommunication was unavoidable, — exile or expatriation a mere question of time. In one of Mirza-Schaffy's sage epigrams we are told that he who thinks the truth must have his horse by the bridle, and he who speaks it must have wings instead of arms.<sup>9</sup> Falk's predicament was symbolical for Ibsen's: —

Like Israel at the Passover I stand,  
Loins girded for the desert, staff in hand.<sup>1</sup>

A more conciliatory author would have quitted the social drama for good as a field in which his every appearance was bound to stir up strife and bitterness. True, the man of genius hopes and feels that the world, of whose ruling opinion and taste he is always in advance, will eventually catch up with his position; but a man like Ibsen suspects that he will not be long marking time on the higher standpoint gained. He will ever keep a decade in advance of the rest, hence he and his public will never dwell at peace in the same resting-place.<sup>2</sup> His first social play had served Ibsen ill with his countrymen, and before the discouragements on every side he had to halt. Having shot his first bolt, he had to wait some time before he renewed his attack, with far greater force than before, upon the castle of conservatism; before he again attempted a drastic seizure of reality in its everyday aspect. His next move would seem to indicate a return, be it permanent

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I, p. 409.

<sup>2</sup> C, p. 370.



or passing, to the earlier range of subjects for dramaturgy.

The subject-matter, then, gave him trouble in plenty. Meanwhile it is almost pathetic to observe his heroic efforts to perfect his work in respect to its form. After *The Vikings* he could not fail to realize that prose was, to say the least, a perfectly feasible and legitimate vehicle of dramatic dialogue. The subject of *Love's Comedy* even seemed downright to call for treatment in prose. Yet though his loyalty to romantic views was wearing off, it was to cost him many pangs to break for good with rime and measure. The experiment with *The Vikings* had succeeded: the archaic flavor of the colloquy saved the poetic quality. But now it was a question of couching in plain, ordinary language wit and gayety, suffused with sentiment, in a dramatized event of yesterday or to-day. Ibsen tried, and failed in the attempt. His powers were unequal to the task which required for its solution long and persistent experimentation; reluctantly he reverted to his past method and set about versifying the dialogue. Metrical speech came to him at all times with extraordinary ease and fluency.

*The Pretenders* ("Kongs-Emnerne," 1864) was given at the Christiania Theatre, January 17, 1864, but was first made famous through the German productions, in 1875, by the excellent *ensemble* of the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen's players. The play is to all appearance historical, built mainly of material contained in "Haakon Haakonsson's Saga." The frequent change of scene, coupled with the "chronicle style," reminds one strongly of Shakespeare's histories. The historic verities, in the main, are kept in-

tact, yet the reconstructive tendency is perceptibly slighter than in *The Vikings*, particularly as regards the linguistic makeup. The reason of this comparative indifference to the temporal flavor is not far to seek. Under guise of the past, Ibsen's real concern is with things and ideas of his own day. The experience with *Love's Comedy* had made him wary of sending his opinions to the joust under their own arms and with visor open. *The Pretenders*, consequently, is the first of Ibsen's "Schlüsseldramen," and in this capacity requires perhaps some "first aid" to the understanding. On the safe authority of George Brandes we have to identify Earl Skule with Ibsen himself, while King Haakon represents Ibsen's more fortunate competitor for leadership, Björnstjerne Björnson. Although doubtless there exists this parallelism, it does not extend to all phases of the drama, for the contestants in the play have their historic function as well, and above all else a self-directing and self-consistent dramatic existence. Their similarity to the two writers lies mainly in the situation, — two men of power contending for the leadership of Norway's people. In portraying their characters, Ibsen has been far more generous to his younger rival than to himself. Haakon figures as a brave and buoyant leader of men, confident of his righteous cause, just and energetic, secure in his kingship because he is endowed by birth and fortune with all kingly qualities. Skule, on the other hand, is a man wrecked in his private happiness and spoiled for chieftaincy by brooding distrust of others and himself. Tormenting doubt of his call was Ibsen's own frame of mind in his harassed and straitened circumstances. He was losing confidence in his poetic vocation

because he was not wholly firm in mind as to the truth of his own convictions. One passage in the drama especially throws light on this attitude. Jatgeir the Skald has asserted that just as some men need sorrow to become singers, so others there may be who need faith or joy — or doubt: —

*King Skule.* Doubt as well?

*Jatgeir.* Ay, but then must the doubter be strong and sound.

*King Skule.* And whom do you call the unsound doubter?

*Jatgeir.* Him who doubts of his own doubt.<sup>1</sup>

The office of Skule as a personification of the poet's own tortured state of mind is corroborated by a suite of sonnets, *In the Picture Gallery* ("I billedgaleriet," 1859).<sup>2</sup> The poet's besetting enemy, Doubt, is pictured as a black elf prompting him with words of discouragement. Professor Roman Woerner, perhaps the subtlest student of Ibsen, is, however, right in regarding the victory of Haakon over Skule as the "description of a saving crisis in a mind that is full of vital energies." Whatever there was in the poet's nature of cowardly and abasing elements which had immediately made common cause against him with the venomous calumnies and insults from without, is overcome by the militant, triumphantly aspiring traits of his character, and forever expelled.<sup>3</sup> The personal allusion that lies in the play forms, however, merely an accessory interest. It does not touch its essential meaning, which lies open to all the world, not only to those initiated in Ibsen's private triumphs or grievances. Mr. Haldane Macfall seeks to epitomize that meaning by a clever contrast: "Here we have the tragedy of the man who steals the *thought* of an-

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II, p. 260.

<sup>2</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, pp. 257-71.

other — just as in *The Vikings* we have the tragedy of the man who steals the *deed* of another.”<sup>4</sup> Stated in terms of motives rather than of acts, it is equally true that *The Pretenders* is one of the maturest dramatic treatments of overweening ambition ; the tragedy of a talent which falls short of the highest achievement because of its inherent inadequacy, but which still cannot find happiness on any lower level. At the same time the momentous chapter of the national history here reproduced has a more than individual significance. The drama reveals a prophetic understanding of Norwegian character and destiny. Ibsen’s higher intellect had been slowly maturing. With this work it proves itself to have come of age.

Technically considered, also, *The Pretenders* marks a great stride on the way to perfection. Whereas in *The Vikings* the *dramatis personæ* hardly deviate from the stereotyped literary patterns of vice and virtue unadmixed, we find in *The Pretenders* light and shadow boldly juxtaposed in the abounding humanity of the characters. Magnificently imagined here, too, are the women: Inga, for whom the poet’s mother was the model, Margrete, Ingeborg, Ragnhild. Perhaps it is a technical flaw, however, that the interest encompasses two heroes in equal measure, and that a third character rivals both of them in spiritual fascination. For in the same category as one of the great character parts of the modern theatre is the figure of Bishop Nicholas Arnesson. Here we see Ibsen rise to his full stature as a master of portraiture. To the superficial view, Nicholas is merely a singular congeries of evil traits, a species of Shakespeare’s Richard III or Schiller’s Franz Moor. But on closer examination the complex character

of the Bishop baffles a crude classification. He is a boundless egotist, but of the "higher" type. His central trait is an unappeasable craving for power over others. His freedom from moral shackles of any sort in the pursuit of his own satisfactions reveals in the high-light of unintentional caricature a not ignoble philosophical lineage. In his veins runs the ichor of the superman, dwelling severely beyond the pale of the good and the evil from the day of Niccolo Machiavelli to that of Friedrich Nietzsche. Says he: "Fulfill your cravings and use your strength: so much right has every man. There is neither good nor evil, up nor down, high nor low."<sup>1</sup> When we read utterances like these, or "I am in the state of innocence: I know not good from evil,"<sup>2</sup> it is perplexing to think that such words could be spoken before Nietzsche had yet arrived to concoct his thrice-distilled homunculus, and before Mr. George Bernard Shaw had taken out a lucrative patent to dilute and acidulate the potent brew for the sober appetites of Anglo-Saxon stomachs. Indeed, this is the most common form of anachronism, genius ruthlessly plagiarizing its posterity. Bishop Nicholas, restating the Machiavellian maxim for absolutist princes in the following sentence, "Whatever is helpful to you is good — whatever lays stumbling-blocks in your path is evil,"<sup>3</sup> was doubtless secure in his total ignorance of Stirner and Nietzsche and Pragmatism and its long-winded apostles.

The excellent delineation of the Bishop's character would prove of still greater attractiveness to the best class of actors were it not for the grim post-mortem rôle that is forced upon him. After having for some time been

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.



disposed of in the flesh, he is reintroduced in the last act as a special envoy of the nether world, charged with the capture of Skule's immortal soul. The indiscreet and sudden foisting of supernaturalism on the rational premises of the play is felt as wholly unwarranted. It is not an isolated instance in Ibsen of melodramatic encroachment on psychological territory.

Students of Ibsen are united in dating from *The Pretenders* his position as a front-rank poet of his country. Unfortunately this just claim was not immediately recognized; no enthusiasm worth speaking about was aroused by the piece. Ibsen now stood in the zenith of his years, and was still, despite the sporadic successes of his work, very far from a general recognition of his literary merits, and without provision for his material existence. His business affairs were in such a plight as to add greatly to his spiritual distress over his position. After his separation from the ill-paid office at the Christiania Theatre, the little family of three was without any regular means of support. As a result of that hardy home thrust at Norwegian society in *Love's Comedy*, he was to all effect proscribed in his own country; so his thoughts and hopes turned abroad. Men of his prominence enjoyed, in consequence of a worthy custom, a national subsidy, "digtergæde," granted by act of the Storthing. The smallness of the country and paucity of readers and buyers of books, coupled with the unprotectedness of literary property, made these pensions really a national debt of honor toward important literary producers. Ibsen, who was placed in a particularly helpless condition by his ineptitude for journalism and hack work, looked long in vain to



the Government for relief; it was not till 1866 that he obtained from the Storting the coveted allowance. In the meantime he was glad enough to get, at the solicitation of Björnson and other faithful and influential friends, a traveling purse of four hundred specie dollars, which, eked out by generous private assistance, would enable him to live one year abroad in reasonable security from want.

So in April, 1864, Henrik Ibsen, thirty-six years of age, exiled himself from Norway, and became almost for the whole remainder of his active life that pitiable object among men, a man without a country. Yet there was to come a time when under the still vivid smart of his expulsion he could not suppress a singular feeling of gratitude for that chastening and bracing experience. In 1872 he sent home his *Ode for the Millennial Celebration* ("Ved Tusendaarfesten") of Norway's Union.

My countrymen, who filled for me deep bowls  
Of wholesome bitter medicine, such as gave  
The poet, on the margin of his grave,  
Fresh force to fight where broken twilight rolls, —  
My countrymen, who sped me o'er the wave,  
An exile, with my griefs for pilgrim-soles,  
My fears for burdens, doubts for staff, to roam, —  
From the wide world I send you greeting home.

I send you thanks for gifts that help and harden,)  
Thanks for each hour of purifying pain,  
Each plant that springs in my poetic garden  
Is rooted where your harshness poured its rain;  
Each shoot in which it blooms and burgeons forth  
It owes to that gray weather from the North;  
The sun relaxes, but the fog secures!  
My country, thanks! My life's best gifts were yours.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Digte*, in *M*, vol. III, pp. 130-35; *SW*, vol. I, pp. 160-66. Cf. Gosse, p. 143, whence the translation is borrowed.

Political events of a momentous nature had added to Ibsen's disgust with his compatriots and superinduced his resolution to quit the country. At the very close of 1863 the so-called second Danish war had broken out on account of the political status of Schleswig-Holstein. The Danes, clutched by the joint superior forces of Prussia and Austria, were ignominiously left in the lurch by their neighbors and brothers of Norway and Sweden. Ibsen never could forgive the Norwegians for not having hastened to the aid of the consanguineous nation. The integrity of Schleswig as a part of Denmark had been a Scandinavian slogan up to the very time of the catastrophe. The breach of faith was the more grievous and inexcusable, as it was not committed by royal incentive, but against the deceased King's wishes by the Storting representing the people of Norway. "Just as *The Pretenders* appeared, Frederick VII died and the war began. I wrote the poem *A Brother in Distress*.<sup>1</sup> Of course it was without effect against the Norwegian Yankeedom which had beaten me at every point, and so I went into exile." This is Ibsen's own explanation of why he turned his back on his native country. But enough has been said to show that his divorce from Norway came as much from social and economic exigencies as from the clash of his patriotic ardor with the apathy of the people.

Not that his patriotism was then to be doubted. In his works up to, and including, his first masterpiece, *The Pretenders*, the national Norwegian note is clearly, almost stridently, audible. And yet he was not cut out for a popular favorite. In his political and social attitude from his

<sup>1</sup> *Digte*, in *M*, vol. III, p. 82; *SW*, vol. I, pp. 61-63.

first puerile outbursts in *Catilina*, Ibsen behaves not as a fiery reformer, rather as a malcontent, unable to bear the restraints imposed by association or to submit to the discipline of a party. He thus failed to construct an effective background for his reformatory activity, the political as well as the social. One reason why Norway was not more deeply stirred by the efforts we have contemplated was that these manifestoes seemed to be lacking in the ingratiations of whole-souled enthusiasm. Was Ibsen perhaps too serious to be taken seriously by the masses? People "felt" in his work a "lack of ideals and convictions." How so many came to think of him as only a critic of the destructive sort, too indolent and indifferent to the weal of humanity to lend a hand in the laying of hard and solid foundations for the higher up-stepping of society, is not easy to explain. Of a certainty the subsequent file of his work sdoes not permit a denial of his idealism. They are one and all emanations of noble idealism, albeit their first intent is to touch the vital necessities of our real existence.

## CHAPTER IV

### BRAND — PEER GYNT

IN curious contradiction to the common opinion that was held about him, Ibsen felt strongly within him the call to be a preacher and a leader of men. His works are of didactical origin, and in so far as they are imperfect, their imperfections lie in that fact. The opposition to him has sought to make capital out of their "tendenciousness," — as though the art of letters stood and fell with Oscar Wilde's finical definition that the sole purpose and meaning of literature is distinction, charm, beauty, and imaginative power. Are we not apt to forget, when deprecating the problem drama of the present, that many great plays of a much earlier day were "Tendenzstücke," no less than *Peer Gynt* and *Pillars of Society*? Schiller's dramas were animated by the strongest ethical motives. No less is this true of Lessing. Nor was the habit ever confined to "pedantic" Germany. Beaumarchais's *Figaro*, Corneille's *Cid* are "plays with a purpose" if ever there were any. Victor Hugo, and a host of younger dramatists before and after Augier and Sardou, would fall under the same æsthetic ban as Ibsen. He simply chanced to be the first poet to build dramas with our *modern* tendencies.<sup>a</sup> A "Tendenzdichter," then, Ibsen was, and without a frank acknowledgment of his plays as instruments of social propaganda no discussion of them could be very profitable. They are not particularly concerned about a consistent theory of

art, however admirable their technical construction. But as to the tenets of Ibsen's social — or should we say anti-social? — ethics, these are breathed forth from every page of his writings. As a moralist, Ibsen was militant, aggressive, contentious. A measure of impatience, nay intolerance, clearly in excess of practical utility for one who would be a reformer, supplied generous employment for his fine pugnacity; we may call it fine because it was put in action for noble causes. For all of Ibsen's work is inspired and guided, like that of his contemporary Tolstoy, by the principle of truthfulness. "Dare to be true" — that is his simple message; only the advice is not addressed to mankind at large, for Ibsen despises the great majority. His understanding of character is profound but cynical; even where he loves, his love is tainted with bitterness. To his thinking, like Nietzsche's, the throng is doomed to callousness and stupor; no use trying to improve and convert the mass; for, as Mr. Shaw avers, the mass is pure machinery and has no principles except principles of mechanics. A saner thing to do is to further and direct the needful revolt of the exalted that are worth saving, against the Brummagem morality of the cud-chewing crowd. The nature of these few and select is essentially noble, though it has been misled to false standards through perverse education. As for the inferiority of the average fellowman, shut your eyes to it, and yours will surely be the fate of a Brand, a Stockmann, a Gregers Werle, according to the measure and quality of your individual folly.

*Brand* (1866) came into being, says Ibsen, "as a result of something which I had not *observed*, but *experienced*."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *C*, p. 193; cf. also *C*, p. 190.



He had wrought after the fashion of all true poets from an inward necessity, in order to disburden himself of a painful experience. Since it is the main object of this book to interpret Ibsen's *ideas*, so as to facilitate his recognition as one of the shaping factors of modern culture, we cannot devote so much attention to the artistic aspects of his dramas. Were one speaking primarily of the master of the dramatic craft, there would indeed be very much to say. Not that there is any intention of entirely overlooking Ibsen's technical service. Right here it is well to insist that his dramas, while replete with intellectual intention, are not tracts but works of art. To this a special reminder should be added anent *Brand*, that it is not to be appraised as a drama, even though it is such in name, but — much as *Faust* or some of Browning's best products — as a "dramatic poem." Although it has eventually reached the theatre, it was not conceptually designed for the stage.<sup>1</sup> It is the first work Ibsen created at a distance from home. He wrote it in 1865, for the most part at Ariccia, near Rome, in the summer months, during which it was his wont to cast his work into a final shape. It was written in riming lines, of four stresses each, changing irregularly from the iambic to the trochaic genus of rhythm. The lilt and melody of the verse had not a little to do with the immense public response. So unexpectedly great was this that within less than four months three good-sized editions were exhausted. To this rousing success no small part was contributed by the circumstance that through

<sup>1</sup> In fact it was first conceived as an epic. The epic *Brand* fragments are to be found in *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. II, pp. 93-154; the very scholarly introduction by Karl Larsen, pp. 47-91, throws much light on the composition.



his friend Björnson's intercession Ibsen's writings, beginning with *Brand*, were published by Frederik Hegel (Gyldendalske Bokhandel) of Copenhagen, justly called the Cotta of the North.

Ibsen used to warn his visitors and correspondents against searching for specific "teachings" in his plays. But this does not alter the undeniable fact that a thesis or contention of some sort is expounded in each of his works, barring possibly the sole instance of *Hedda Gabler*. The *hæc fabula docet* is never absent from his satires. In this didactical temper of the poet lies also the explanation of his ineradicable bias for symbolism and allegory. The truth-seeking realist in Ibsen, however, always sends the sermonizer looking for his models in the province of the actual. Realistic, too, as a rule, is the background in these pictures. In *Brand*, needless to repeat, that background is political or, better, historical; the fiery harangues of the hero have a barbed point for the Norwegian conscience, for they make the people recollect with what criminal indifference they had looked on the de-Scandinavization of Schleswig-Holstein after the voluminous rhetoric expended at their mass meetings.

But who was the original Brand? With much likelihood of truth Sören Kierkegaard (1813-1855)<sup>b</sup> has been suggested; and in spite of Ibsen's express denial that remarkable man's life and doctrine, in particular his religious rigor which led to his violent separation from his church and to a tragic ending, left unquestionable marks of influence in the great poem.

In Kierkegaard theologian and philosopher were blended. He devoted his meditations almost entirely to

the subject of religion, but his interest attached not to the details of dogma, but to the basic principle of Christianity. This he interpreted in a spirit different from that of other religious leaders in that he upheld with the utmost emphasis and consistency the "absolute ideal demand," resembling, in this respect, the contemporary German radical thinker Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). Yet the two thinkers arrive from similar premises at far-sundered poles of belief: Feuerbach renouncing Christianity, while Kierkegaard embraced it with ever-growing fervor. In his conception the Christian religion is, objectively viewed, paradoxical and absurd, and repellent to the reason or the "common sense"; it attains reality and validity solely in the *religious consciousness*, and becomes an object of passionate love for the believer. Life in the faith, he claims, is a contract between the Divinity and the individual. For congregational religious practice he has a pronounced distaste. The "official" Christianity of the churches was vehemently condemned by Kierkegaard on the ground of its aversion, nay outright opposition, to the imitation of Christ. Christianity as it exists to-day he maintained to be a partnership between Christ's teaching and a worldly doctrine, a partnership from which the nobler member is gradually pushed and crowded out. Real Christianity is equivalent to renunciation of the world. Hence the religion of Christ should and must be a gospel of sorrow. Kierkegaard's powerful influence was due in large measure to his noble, uplifting diction and delivery.<sup>c</sup> However, the personality of Brand is drawn in some of its essentials after one of Kierkegaard's disciples with whom Ibsen was acquainted at home and afterwards in Dresden, the

evangelist Gustav Adolph Lammers (1802-1878); so Ibsen stated to his biographer Henrik Jaeger. Lammers, who was a pastor in Ibsen's native town of Skien, played a prominent part in the revolt against the established church. His agitation reached a climax in 1855, the same year as Kierkegaard's, and led to his resignation from the pastorate. In 1856 he founded a free congregation that worshiped in the fields and on the hills under the open sky, — in *Brand* poetic use of the incident is made. But over and above these relations to other men, Brand is also a self-portrait of the poet, as are other leading figures in his plays, reflecting the deep impressions of spiritual experiences recently passed through. At all events, Brand must be classed as a composite portrait, not a strictly true copy from life. While upon the subject of resemblances, the similarity of *Brand* to Gerhart Hauptmann's fairy drama, *The Sunken Bell* (1897), may be pointed out. It extends beyond the central *motif* to many features of composition and characterization. Agnes, the wife, as well as Brand himself, and their philistine *entourage*, also entire scenes, like the exodus to the mountains, have their counterpart in the much later work of the German poet.

George Brandes has aptly characterized *Brand* as the "tragedy of idealism." One might with equal justice call it the tragedy of the extremist. The incompatibility of the practical and the ideal had been revealed before, though more timorously, in *Love's Comedy*. In *Brand* the subject receives drastic treatment. Brusquely a challenge was here hurled against the vapid pietism of the Norwegian people; their half-souled enthusiasm and reluctance to follow their own ideals. To Ibsen, for the first

time in the history of his land, fell the stern duty of the patriot to chastise and chasten his fatherland. There is perhaps no truer test of patriotism.

He flouts the cardinal national faults under the simile of the three evil genii —

Which wildest reel, which blindest grope,  
Which furthest roam from home and hope: —  
*Light-heart*, who, crown'd with leafage gay,  
Loves by the dizziest verge to play; —  
*Faint-heart*, who marches slack and slow  
Because old wont will have it so;  
*Wild-heart*, who, borne on lawless wings,  
Sees fairness in the foulest things.<sup>1</sup>

But the application of the satire does not have to halt before the sixty-fifth degree of northern latitude. It would be extremely unfair for Europeans, or Americans for the matter of that, to read out of *Brand* an exclusive indictment of the brave little northern nation. On the issues raised, all nations are equally at sea, and nearly all in the same boat, and there is no country under this twentieth-century sun where it is made more difficult than with us for the “differenced” man, the “Adelejer” in the sense of Ibsen, to save his selfhood for the efficient performance of a part in the economy of society.

We stand on democratic ground,  
Where what the people think is right;  
Shall one against the mass propound  
His special views on black and white?<sup>2</sup>

Woe to the man who pushes his head above the common level! Democracy insists relentlessly on conformance to

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III, p. 36. The passages from *Brand* are given in the rendering by Professor C. H. Herford. *Brand* has also been translated by William Archer. Both translations are preceded by valuable introductions.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. III, p. 140.

its ideals. So it makes for a dead level and insures the rule of the commonplace. It standardizes men, uniforms them sartorially, morally, and intellectually. According to the prevailing gospel of mediocrity the eleventh commandment reads: Be like unto one another. Do not grow beyond the average measure.

Let each his own excrescence pare,  
Neither uplift him, nor protrude,  
But vanish in the multitude.<sup>1</sup>

and: —

But all your angles must be rounded,  
Your gnarls and bosses scraped and pounded!  
You must grow sleek as others do,  
All singularities eschew,  
If you would labor without let.<sup>2</sup>

What is unfailingly the result, if this principle is applied beyond a certain medium level of civilization? Ibsen answers for us: "The very praiseworthy attempt to make our people a democratic community has inadvertently gone a good way toward making us a plebeian community."<sup>3</sup>

The fear of being dissonant with the rest of the world causes men to seek refuge in the relinquishment of the central ego, and results ultimately in the loss of personality, the abandonment of the very essence of life.

*The Sexton.* But yet you said that life was best?

*The Schoolmaster.* By dean and deacon that's professed.

And I too, say so, like the rest, —

Provided, mind, the "life" in view

Is that of the great Residue.<sup>4</sup>

The fight with fortune can be won only in alliance with public opinion: hence man is softened, to use an

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III, p. 207. <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208. <sup>3</sup> *C*, p. 351. <sup>4</sup> Vol. III, p. 180.



Emersonian phrase, into a "mush of concession." True manhood is effectually neutralized by the chief organs of the body politic. Church and State side with the mean-natured. The collision between the single will and the many-headed is most unequal.

*The Schoolmaster.* We cannot fitly condescend  
To smirch ourselves in human slime.  
Let no man, says the Parson, dare  
To be two things at the same time;  
And with the best will, no one can  
Be an official and a man.<sup>1</sup>

In the terror of public opinion lies deeply rooted the universal evil of hypocrisy, the first concomitant of sordid selfishness. Ibsen, like his Brand, feels keenly that society works sinfully against its vital interest when it ruthlessly irons out the inherent human tendency to variation from the type. Two generations ago Darwin, endowing the world with a new organon in the science of evolution, taught the high bio-economic value of differentiation. Yet seemingly the truth has not even now percolated our dense social intelligence that, so far from being contrary to the law of nature, social differentiation is actually enjoined upon humankind. In his illuminating collection of lectures, *The Bible of Nature*, Professor J. Arthur Thomson points out a noteworthy lesson concerning the preciousness of individuality.

Variations supply the raw material of progress, and variations spell individuality. This is one of the biological common-places which in human affairs we persistently ignore. In the educational mill . . . and in our inexorable social criticism, how systematically we pick off the buds of individuality, —

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III, p. 186.



idiosyncrasies and crankiness, we say, — spoiling how many flowers. It is said that we do this to prevent failures and criminals, but are we very successful in this prevention? How many of both do we make by repressing individuality?<sup>d</sup>

Modern opposition to the philistinism of society, its resemblance to a centrifugal dissipation of force notwithstanding, is ulteriorly the last remove from an anti-social crusade. It springs in reality from a scientific basis. The antidotes and cure-alls prescribed for the social disease of stagnancy are apt perhaps to be worse than the disease. Or how much comfort is there to be derived for the ills we bear from the thought of Nietzsche's "gorgeous blonde roving beast" amuck midst social chaos? Seldom have philosophical inferences been more conflicting than in the interpretation of Ibsen's social gospel. But no sympathetic student of Ibsen will refuse to join in the verdict that his social ideas and ideals do not exceed the bounds of reason and legitimate expectation of the future. At heart never a red-hot revolutionist, his at first excessive individualism passes step by step into a generous, yet prudent subjectivism which aims to vindicate full freedom for the individual, without fatally ignoring, after the extremist's fashion, the eternal principles of justice and righteousness. Everybody should be encouraged to rise, even though but few will gain the crest of the mountain.

Let us stop at this point of our study to inquire for Ibsen's social creed and doctrine at the time when with *Brand* he came prominently before the public. We must not forget, however, that his socio-critical tenets underwent, in the course of his moral and mental evolution, some extremely significant modifications. But since it

so happens that Americans identify Ibsen's convictions mainly with the gist of his earlier works, let us for the present be content to indicate the general drift of his social philosophy during what may be termed his anarchistical period. The relation of his theories to the spirit of the times, to which they are in sharp opposition, is perfectly obvious.

It was essentially an era of political reconstruction that preceded and followed the great Franco-Prussian War.<sup>6</sup> The fast-growing popular consciousness demanded of the constituted authorities a bettering of material conditions and likewise an extension of liberties. The governments, at least those of Germany, feeling securer than ever in their greatly strengthened prestige, made no haste to fulfill the liberal demands. From this resulted a strenuous activity among the Liberals to obtain relief through the one obviously legitimate channel. They set about in earnest to reform the organized institutions. To Ibsen, with his undemocratic, in fact outright anti-democratic notions, that idea was repugnant. To his view, the endeavors of the political reformers had an altogether wrong aim. He frankly tells us that "changes in forms of government are mere pettifogging affairs," denoting a degree less or a degree more of foolishness. Even total revolutions in the controlling agencies of society would be unable to set the world right. Nothing can do that, thinks the author of *Catilina* and *Love's Comedy*, save a radical self-effectuation of society along lines of unrestricted freedom. Ibsen, then, dreams, like many a Utopian before him and after him, of a development of the individual so wonderful in its efficacy and reach that under enlightened

anarchy mankind would attain an almost ideal state. We should note broadly at the outset that, inasmuch as his Utopia postulates the complete regeneration of man, it would be preposterous to call Ibsen a pessimist.

What is there in the way of that happy re-birth? No smaller obstacle than society itself and its chief agent, the state. Ibsen in his early ardor did not scruple to enunciate the consequences. In letters to Brandes written in 1870-1871, he exasperatedly inveighs against the state. "Away with the state," shouts he; "I will take part in that revolution."<sup>1</sup> He makes the bold assertion that the duty of the higher personality is to undermine every form of government. And this idea, with its dangerous correlates, becomes for a short while a veritable obsession with him. But the excesses of the French Commune opened his eyes and made him relinquish his faith in the un-mixed desirability of lawless blessedness. Finding himself forced to repudiate the gospel of lawlessness as a thing for which mankind is not quite ready, he nevertheless continues radical in thought and attitude. He pleads now for relative liberty: since absolute freedom is impracticable, let the individual enjoy the largest amount of freedom that is possible. This might strike us but as a circuitous plea for the conservation of the existing order, if Ibsen did not continue to denounce the existing order and its regnant code of morals. The truth of the matter is, Ibsen cared next to nothing for liberty in the usual party sense of the word. "Liberty," he once said, "is not the same thing as political liberty." The following might have come from the pen of Lessing, so strikingly alike is it in tone and

<sup>1</sup> C, p. 208.

feeling to that famous passage in the latter's reply to Head-Pastor Goeze: "The only thing I love about liberty is the struggle for it. I care nothing for the possession of it. He who possesses liberty otherwise than as an aspiration, possesses it dead and soulless." But Ibsen ends with a malicious thrust: "It is, however, exactly this dead maintenance of a certain given standpoint of liberty that is characteristic of the communities which go by the name of states — and this is what I have called worthless."<sup>1</sup> Only an idealist could utter such words, and who could be farther removed from pessimism than an idealist with a faith in the progressive evolution of human ideals! At a banquet in 1887, Ibsen said: "I believe that the biologic theory of evolution is true also regarding spiritual phases of life. . . . I have repeatedly been called a pessimist. And so I am, in so far as I disbelieve in the constancy of human ideals. But I am likewise an optimist, in so far as I firmly believe in the self-procreation of ideals and in their capacity of development."<sup>2</sup> Ibsen is not a pessimist, for he does not think life an evil, but an *optimist*, because he thinks life too good to be wasted as we waste it. Both idealism and individualism enter into Ibsen's peremptory command: "*Be yourself.*" The test of selfhood, however, lies in the willingness to suffer for one's ideals. I sometimes wonder why those who in spite of everything insist on calling Ibsen a pessimist do not change the indictment and call him, on the contrary, "überspannt" or "verstiegen." They would be excusable on the ground of his idealism being incomprehensible to meaner natures.

Ibsen's social panacea, we have said, is truthfulness. As

<sup>1</sup> C, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> SNL, p. 57.

poet, thinker, and social critic he dedicates himself to the service of Truth. By truthfulness, he means loyalty and fidelity to one's self. Maintenance of selfhood is the foremost duty. Man should take no dictates from without. The measure and motive power of his conduct should proceed from within. He should do what his will prompts him to do. Only in this case can he be called a personality. In *Brand* the thought is forcibly expressed in the temerarious challenge: —

Be passion's slave, be pleasure's thrall, —  
 But be it utterly, all in all!  
 Be not to-day, to-morrow one,  
 Another when a year is gone.  
 Be what you are with all your heart,  
 And not by pieces and in part.<sup>1</sup>

To fulfill one's self — therein should man seek his mission,  
 as it is his right.

Room within the wide world's span  
 Self completely to fulfill,  
 That's a valid right of man,  
 And no more than that I will.<sup>2</sup>

Ibsen's greatest dread, — we may say his one great dread, — and his most constant theme upon which he plays so many variations, is the *lie*. The conduct he sanctions consists negatively in abstention from every form of falsehood, positively in the vigorous assertion of true convictions and war of extermination waged regardless of consequences against all recognized wrongs and shams. Now, in a world ruled by cant and compromise, the hebdomadal bit of meek official admonishment from the pulpit can do no appreciable good.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.



See, child; of all men God makes one  
Demand: No coward compromise!  
Whose work's half done or falsely done,  
Condemn'd with God his whole word lies.  
We must give sanction to this teaching  
By living it and not by preaching.<sup>1</sup>

The moth-eaten Christian faith of the common Sunday variety has lost its wide sweep, its conduct-inspiring verity and all-embracing appeal. It has been debased to serve as a mild and harmless anodyne for our aching consciences. We indulge in two heterogeneous codes of conduct, both ready-made, the one for practical, the other for contemplative purposes. There is a set of rules for the human beast couchant and another, ruthless and strenuous, for the rampant brute in us. We call ourselves Christians: that means, if it means anything, imitators of Christ. Yet full well we know that a letter-perfect or even a spiritually approximate imitation of Christ would land every mother's son of us in the poorhouse, jail, or insane asylum. The experiment has been worked out more than once, psychologically, by Tolstoy; Arne Garborg in *Paulus* has brought such a consistent follower of Christ, or better of Tolstoy, on the stage; and quite recently Gerhart Hauptmann, in *A Fool in Christ*, *Emanuel Quint*, has traced convincingly the inevitable undoing of a Christlike character by the forces of the world. Profession and practice have drifted too widely apart among us. Sophistical evasion has become our second nature, till in our own duplicity we conceive of God himself as the grand casuist on whose good-humored indulgence we may safely rely.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III, p. 85.



Of course! the reasonable plan!  
 For from of old they know their man,  
 Since all his works the assurance breathe :  
 Yon gray-beard may be haggled with! <sup>1</sup>

Against an age seeking for its sinfulness and meanness an ultra-rational sanction in the doctrine of vicarious atonement, arises Brand, fulminant with a resurgence of genuine Christian zeal, ready to spend his vast energy in the onslaught against frivolity and cowardice.

It is our age whose pining flesh  
 Craves burial at these hands of mine.  
 Ye will but laugh and love and play,  
 A little doctrine take on trust,  
 And all the bitter burden thrust  
 On one who came, ye have been told,  
 And from your shoulders took away  
 Your great transgressions manifold.  
 He bore for you the cross, the lance, —  
 Ye therefore have full leave to dance:  
 Dance, then, — but where your dancing ends  
 Is quite another thing, my friends.<sup>2</sup>

He, Brand, rejects every form or suggestion of compromise. Thought and life must be identical. Ideals must be actualized. "All or nothing" is his defiance. And although for him this war-cry has a far different, a loftier meaning than for King Skule<sup>3</sup> who shouted it before, still this is true, that in a reformer of his type the extreme of altruism is inseparably commingled with an ominous passion for authority. Undeniably there is an inconsistency in Brand, a veritable break in his ethics; the fight against unfreedom of opinion and conduct is led by a stubborn absolutist. A man with a fixed idea becomes

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>3</sup> *The Pretenders*; vol. II, p. 286.

invariably an enemy of society, if he would force his purpose, be it never so pure, upon an unready and unwilling community. Brand's fixed idea is the omnipotence of will-power in the true follower of Christ.

It is will alone that matters,  
Will alone that mars or makes,  
Will, that no distraction scatters,  
And that no resistance breaks.<sup>1</sup>

The aspiration of man's will "should exceed his grasp."

But help is idle for the man  
Who nothing wills but what he can.<sup>2</sup>

We will grant the apotheosis of will, with this qualification, that it is disciplined, not overwrought, will the world stands in need of. For will depends for its good or evil effect in the world upon its inspiring source and final aim. Brand is the one man out of the millions to carry out his dogmas to the jot. It is doubly unfortunate for him that his variety of religion happens to be harsh and hard, an icy northern Puritanism whose revolting cruelty is fully brought out in the test. His fanatical over-righteousness carries blight and misery to his human destinies, and martyrizs all that are near to him, his mother, his only child, and his self-sacrificing wife whom he has treated as a tool, — as a gauge, namely, of his own progress in saintly renunciation. "Brand dies a saint," says Bernard Shaw, in summing up his life, "having caused more intense suffering by his saintliness than the most talented sinner could possibly have done with twice his opportunities." And yet, — to shrink with disgust from Brand's unholy sanctity, and dismiss his case as one of religious dementia, were to

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

misconceive, with the help of insincerity, the poet's view of that character. The Quixotic over-righteousness of the fanatic, resolved at any cost or sacrifice to practice what he preaches, is at all events real with those vital qualities which we admire and honor in human nature; far more respectable in the eyes of a man of religious temper than the conduct of the lukewarm conformists to whom religion can be nothing but "a charnel-house haunted with dead ideas and lifeless old beliefs." Brand loosens his wild idealism against the sleek officialdom of the village and the petty materialism of his flock. Their lethargic dullness does flare up for an instant in response to his fiery eloquence; there awakes in them a desire to embrace the ideals he avows. But the vivification of the humdrum crowd is transient. How quickly in that symbolical climb to the higher planes their asthmatic enthusiasm breaks down! How promptly they are dragged down from their aspirations by the first paltry temptation which comes in their path — the promise of a good catch of herring! Very much as in *An Enemy of the People* Dr. Stockmann is left at the end with a single sympathizer, a fellow hopelessly befuddled with liquor, — so Brand at last drags his slow course upward, "a warrior off to fight," his whole army consisting in a half-witted gypsy girl "that lags far in the rear." The Dean hits off the truth: —

When he has still'd his losing whim,  
This is the epitaph for him:  
"Here lieth Brand; his tale's a sad one,  
One soul he saved, — and that a mad one." <sup>1</sup>

Brand is disheartened and demoralized by the fruitlessness of his endeavors and the desertion of his flock. Unlike

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III, p. 243.

Stockmann, who maintains that "the strongest man is he who fights alone," Brand, in the course of events, bursts out twice in the despairing cry: —

Hopeless is he that fights alone! <sup>1</sup>

The play ends properly with Brand's utter desolation, agony, and death. Yet Ibsen half evaded the dispensation of poetic justice by means of a mystical finale picturing the assumption of Brand in a manner resembling the final scene in *Faust*. Under the guidance of the Eternally Feminine he is converted from his stern religion. The ice-fetters break away from his heart. At last he can weep. And as the avalanche swallows him up, his query: —

Shall they wholly miss thy Light  
Who unto man's utmost might  
Will'd —?

is answered, through the crashing thunder:

He is the God of *Love*.<sup>2</sup>

This conclusion would in itself suffice to disprove the foolish allegation that in *Brand* the religious feeling is assailed or vilified. It is only the pseudo-religious cant of the mob and the withering fanaticism of the zealot that are condemned. Brand's life was a total failure because he, a priest, had not acknowledged the God of Love. He failed and perished because of his Old Testament belief that the Lord is a wrathful and jealous God, and his idiosyncrasy that voluntary martyrdom is the sole divine test of Faith.<sup>3</sup>

Any unprejudiced student of the poem must realize

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III, pp. 109 and 197: Yes, hopeless he that fights alone!

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

that the poet's sympathy in course of the drama has considerably shifted. Although Brand is portrayed in such a way as to imply the poet's original assent to his view of life, he is in the end not any longer represented as being morally in the right. A would-be builder-up, he is perverted by a certain defect in his nature into a nihilistic destroyer of happiness: his intolerance is a phase of the national Norwegian state of mind, the critical idiosyncrasy. At first, he proclaims: "Be thyself, whoever thou art. Have the courage to be what nature made you." Yet in defiance of his own blatant proclamation of individualism, Brand twists his ideal demand into a general order, issued to all men, to be like unto Brand's notion of a real man, that is, like himself. First he is a subjectivist, last a dogmatist. So there is left the impression of an irreconcilable contradiction. For the background of this tragedy is unquestionably a satire on the soulless despotism of the unfree crowd. Brand was to impersonate a plea for liberty, but under the tyranny of his Puritanism he turns out neither to be free himself nor to allow others to be free.

Our poet's habit of ruminating on vital questions, of looking at things from every coin of vantage, of peering into their hidden recesses, coupled with his inborn incredulity, — Brandes says somewhere that "Mistrust was Ibsen's Muse," — leads to the repeated resumption of the same theme. Ibsen never stops at seeing one side when all human affairs that are of any consequence seem to have more than one side to them. *Peer Gynt* undoubtedly is a species of continuation of *Brand*, or, let us say more accurately, a continuation of the sermon on human



will.<sup>1</sup> Viewed in their intimate concatenation with many plays that were to follow, the two poems treat of two opposite phases of idealism run mad; other aspects of the same philosophical concept are shown in the social and symbolical series, having already been hinted in *The Pretenders*, *Love's Comedy*, etc. The philosophy of Ibsen's works plays about the comprehensive idea of self-realization. This, as gradually understood by him, is not a synonym of sheer subjectivism or egoism; rather self-realization is raised to a high level of social morality, since to Ibsen it simply means the realization for each man of what is best in his nature.

In Brand the passion for truth, served by a surfeit of will, leads to the overthrow of reason and the development of incurable megalomania. For, as is said in *Peer Gynt*, —

Truth, when carried to excess,  
Ends in wisdom written backwards.<sup>2</sup>

Peer Gynt is Brand's veriest antitype; over against the latter's superabundance of character he shows an almost total want of it. He, too, is an idealist, but one utterly devoid of Brand's capacity for sustained endeavor. A self-seeking, self-satisfied, light-hearted good-for-nothing; a species of cousin Norwegian to the amiable and happy-go-lucky Rip Van Winkle.

He lives by impulse, without initiative, energy, aim. As Brand's soul feeds on self-denial, so Peer vegetates on self-indulgence. It is the contrast between the stern

<sup>1</sup> The first reference to *Peer Gynt* occurs in a letter to the publisher Hegel, in 1867. *C*, pp. 134-35.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. iv, p. 160.



Puritan and the inconsequent worldling. Yet we have said, Peer is an idealist after his own fashion, and this is also true. As in Brand Will is incarnate, so is Fantasy incarnate in Gynt. He is the victim of an imagination that knows neither curb nor rudder. It fights for him, battles with monsters and mountain sprites, it even erects imperial thrones for him, yet cannot help him to an honest living. Peer is a towering giant in the art of dreaming, wishing, nay, even "willing"; — he can do anything but *do*. In Brand we have the unbroken, in Gynt the crumbling personality, — crumbling because it is not held together by some kind of moral sense. Into our estimate of him, the consideration of heredity and early environment should enter. He is the true son of a careless, freehanded, riotous father who was once very rich and ended life as a peddler. With such a drunken spendthrift for his father, and nurtured by a half-crazy mother on fairy tales and adventures, his mendacity is constitutional, pathological. He *has* to lie, because he is not fitted for the truth; it is a case of *Pseudologia Phantastica*.<sup>9</sup> For instance, his hunting adventures are made out of whole cloth. The substratum for this character was given in Norwegian folklore. The self-deceiving, romancing Peer is related to the good-natured braggarts, dreamers, and liars, the Träumerhannes, Münchhausens, and other "Aufschneider" and Gascognards of older literature, as well as to our more recent acquaintance, Daudet's immortal alp-climber and lion-hunter Tartarin. Of literary patterns Jaeger mentions Frederik Paludan-Mueller's (1809–1876) *Adam Homo* and Byron's *Don Juan*.

Ibsen is said to have used living models also. There has

been prominent mention especially of a certain young Dane, a blithe specimen of conceited humanity posing as a poet, whom Ibsen knew while summering at Capri and Ischia. Aasmund Olafson Vinje (1818–1870), one of Ibsen's Christiania friends, has been wrongly connected with the character. But Vinje comes into the play only in a subsidiary part; he is the original "Huhu," in whom the Maalstraevers are ridiculed.<sup>h</sup> That personal experiences have left their marks on the poem in a variety of ways, goes perhaps without saying: "My own mother," Ibsen avows, "served as the model of Aase, with the necessary exaggeration."<sup>1</sup> In the description of the revels at the house of Jon Gynt, he had the environment of his own childhood clearly in mind. By his author's decree Peer Gynt was to have a representative function. Peer Gynt typifies the Norwegian nation in all its faults and shams squeezed into a single skin. Brand and Peer Gynt, though grown on foreign soil, are nevertheless true children of Norway. As Reich puts it, Ibsen the man had migrated from the North to the South; the poet traveled in an opposite direction. The distance had lent to the people of his native land not indeed a new enchantment, but perspective and — since according to Ibsen all poets are farsighted — greater sharpness and clearness of outline. Again we see his patriotism taking a polemic form. In our poem Ibsen accuses his compatriots of being liars from sheer exuberance of imagination; but the final acts of *Peer Gynt* would go to show that shrewd, grasping opportunism and sordid materialism can well coexist with a temperamental dread of decision in the larger affairs of

<sup>1</sup> C, p. 200.

individual and national life. The fantast, when finding himself outmatched in his folly by prisoned maniacs, suddenly veers round to the opposite of his own character and becomes the shrewd, dry, unscrupling man of business.

Peer is the man who does not find the way to an object right through its obstacles, but skirts forever roundabout, being a worshiper of the Great Boyg, the god of the ways that are crooked. The "Be thyself" of Brand is seemingly also Peer's ruling principle, —

What should a man be?  
Himself, is my concise reply.  
He should regard *himself* and *his*.<sup>1</sup>

But what then is the Gyntish self? Gynt's answer reveals the full difference between his invertebrate egotism and the rigid self-assertiveness of Brand: —

The Gyntish Self — it is the host  
Of wishes, appetites, desires, —  
The Gyntish Self, it is the sea  
Of fancies, exigencies, claims,  
All that, in short, makes my breast heave,  
And whereby I, as I, exist.<sup>2</sup>

Imagine, if you can, a more compressed yet complete caricature of the "superman" than this "Emperor of Himself." It is a far, far cry from Brand's impassioned plea for "Selvejer Adlen," self-owning nobility, to Gynt's self-pampering egocentric theory of life, "To thyself be enough," which "severs the whole race of men from the troll-folk." Gynt lacks the strength to do, the strength to renounce, the strength to sin; in fine, the strength to be. He is neither good nor bad, because to be either requires

<sup>1</sup> Vol. iv, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

character. When his course is run, he is fitted nor for heaven nor hell. At most he can be turned to account as junk, since the Master is "thrifty" and —

Flings nothing away as entirely worthless,  
That can be made use of as raw material.<sup>1</sup>

The Button-Moulder, i.e., Death, informs him: —

Now, you were designed for a shining button  
On the vest of the world; but your loop gave way;  
So into the waste-box you needs must go,  
And then, as they phrase it, be merged in the mass.<sup>2</sup>

Gynt has not enough collectivism in his nature to realize the social teleology of such institutions as heaven and hell and the casting-ladle, too, and is blind to the justice of his fate.

*Peer.* I'm sure I deserve better treatment than this;  
I'm not nearly so bad as perhaps you think, —  
Indeed I've done more or less good in the world; —  
At worst you may call me a sort of a bungler, —  
But certainly not an exceptional sinner.

*The Button-Moulder.* Why, that is precisely the rub, my man;  
You're no sinner at all in the higher sense;  
That's why you're excused all the torture-pangs,  
And, like others, land in the casting-ladle:<sup>3</sup>

. . . . .  
You're nor one thing nor t'other, then, only so so;  
A sinner of really grandiose style  
Is nowadays not to be met on the highways.  
It wants much more than merely to wallow in mire;  
For both vigor and earnestness go to a sin.<sup>4</sup>

As Gynt, so fares the majority.

*Peer.* The race has improved so remarkably.

*The Lean One.* No, just the reverse; it's sunk shamefully low; —  
The majority end in the casting-ladle.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. iv, p. 238.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 236-37.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

The hideous truth at last dawns on the self-deluding old wretch as he contemplates the slag of his burned-out life.

I fear I was dead long before I died.<sup>1</sup>

Ibsen has not failed in impartial justice also to the redeeming side of Peer, the abounding good-nature flowing initially from that deep well of love within him which was eventually drained and dried up by selfishness. Peer's character is given a poetic lift by his touching tenderness towards his mother — forming a striking contrast to Brand's cruel rigor in the same relation; whereas the implacable priest denies his dying mother's prayer for consolation because she would not fulfill unto the letter his command of complete renunciation of the world, Peer makes his mother's last moments happy, making her soul ride heavenward on the wings of his loving fancy. In considering the melodramatic ending where Peer, much as Brand by Agnes, is guided heavenward by the deathless devotion of the ill-used and forsaken Solveig, one even feels as if the poet's spontaneous affection for his washrag of a hero had tempered justice almost too strongly with mercy. There would seem to be a logical inconsistency between the end in the casting-ladle and the plainly hinted prospect of heaven. The poet resorts to an explanation on the ground of Peer's "split personality." The actual Peer is but the shadow of his real self. He does not understand the law of his own nature. The true, the potential Peer Gynt dwelt as an ideal in the bosom of a loving woman.

*Peer.* Then tell me what thou knowest!  
Where was I, as myself, as the whole man, the true man?

<sup>1</sup> Vol. iv, p. 266.



Where was I, with God's sigil upon my brow?  
*Solveig.* In my faith, in my hope, and in my love.<sup>1</sup>

One feels, besides, like protesting, on the score of justice, shall not the chances of humanity be lessened if the best ingredients are separated and saved out of the scrap metal of which a future race is to be cast? It is something of a puzzle, and we can only look forward, with the Button-Moulder: —

At the last cross-road we will meet again, Peer;  
 And *then* we'll see whether — I say no more.<sup>2</sup>

Until then we must be sustained by faith in the all-redeeming power of love.

Strictly considered, *Peer Gynt* is not a drama. Judged as one, it fails from lack of design. It was not intended for the stage, although it did make its way there in the long run. Again, as in *Brand*, the more convenient, far less exacting form of a dramatic poem suited the poet better. The dialogue flows with blithe cadence jingling through richly diversified measures. No less than seven varieties of verse are used, but the complexity of the metrical scheme is mitigated by the simple, almost conversational tone of the language. The vehicle of bitter satire, the piece is born none the less of a lighter, airier mood and pulsates with a romantic love of life. With this the bettered material circumstances of the poet, at last enjoying his "digter-gage" (since 1866), had doubtless something to do. Of Ibsen's riper works *Peer Gynt*, with the sole possible exception of *The League of Youth*, is the most light-

<sup>1</sup> Vol. IV, p. 270. Peer's exclamation, "God, here was my kaiserdom!" (p. 230), brings to mind Sudermann's fairy-tale play *Die drei Reihherfedern*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.



hearted, if such a term may be applied to such a sombre poet's creations. Even farcical incidents are not lacking, as in the scene at the lunatic asylum. The director Begriffenfeldt (originally named Phrasenfeldt), crazy himself, locks his patients into cages and throws the key into a well. When one of the lunatics asks for a knife wherewith to kill himself, the director politely hands him one, and as the madman proceeds to cut his own throat, he is admonished to be neat about it and not to squirt.

The subject-matter was in so far thankless as most of the folklore utilized was familiar to but a portion of the Norwegian public, and must perforce be wholly lost on the foreigner. In a measure the same disadvantage affects the conception of the principal figure, but him at least the poet succeeded in thoroughly vivifying. As for the rest, Ibsen was far from straining after a realistic consistency which would have been at discord with the half-mythical, wholly fantastic imagery, and even went to some lengths to guard the reader's sense of the unreality of the events. Lest the audience, by stretch of their own Gyntian imagination, be too firmly domiciled in fairy-land, the poet once almost brutally rouses them by a fine bit of romantic irony: —

*Peer.* Avaunt thee, bugbear! Man, begone!  
I will not die! I must ashore!  
*The Passenger.* Oh, as for that, be reassured; —  
One dies not midmost of Act Five.<sup>1</sup>

While *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* were both, in a sense, written in defiance of romanticism, they are themselves incorrigibly romantic. The romantic category to which

<sup>1</sup> Vol. iv, p. 213.

*Peer Gynt* belongs is the "Märchendrama"; a species of play to which in the nineteenth century Franz Grillparzer and Ferdinand Raimund have made noble contributions, and, among earlier masters of the drama, notably Calderon de la Barca and Goethe. In recent times the popularity of this *genre* has revived not only under the hands of Simon-pure romanticists like Maeterlinck, but "naturalists" have also essayed it, particularly in order to penetrate through the revelations of dream life to the true inwardness of human character. In *Peer Gynt*, too, as in Hauptmann's *Hannele*, the imaginings of the hero are visualized. Inasmuch as in the fairy tale, whether recited or enacted, the operation of natural laws and therewith the ordered processes of thoughts and events are suspended, the author enjoys full license of invention in furthering his psychological purpose. Accordingly the "Märchendrama" flings the door wide open to symbolism and allegory. For example, Ibsen himself is authority for the interpretation of Solveig's lullaby as a symbol of death.<sup>4</sup> Yet in the large *Peer Gynt* has to be viewed as a vivid phantasmagory rather than fleshless allegory. In effect a fairy play has a realness all its own, and is an artistic protest against the persistent and sometimes narrow-minded attempts at identifying the drama with the sober realities of every day. All the same, this species has not escaped the influence of greater artistic veracity in our day. It, too, has profited from the general technical improvements by the importation of greater verisimilitude which, far from interfering with the spiritual message, helps to formulate it all the more convincingly. We know from the pictures of Arnold Böcklin,

Franz Stuck, and many other painters, how greatly a certain realistic humor is apt to humanize the denizens of the world of fancy. For fairy comedy the Viennese school of writers had early in the nineteenth century set a style and method to which the most eminent masters of that sort of play have been indebted. The method is so familiar to the present generation that a mere mention of the names Ludwig Fulda (*Der Talisman*, 1892, *Der Sohn des Khalifen*, 1896), Ernst Rosmer (pseudonym for Elsa Bernstein, *Königskinder*, 1895), Adelheid Wette (*Hänsel und Gretel*, 1893), will be sufficient to recall it. In German books the modern resuscitation of the "Märchendrama" is usually credited to Ibsen's contemporary, the Danish poet Holger Drachmann (*Es war einmal*, 1886), but it seems to me that for the naturalization of this variety of drama in our generation, Ibsen with *Peer Gynt* was the first eloquent sponsor, and that consequently he must be named prominently among the influences that have made modern art a synthesis of romanticism and naturalism.<sup>1</sup> The exquisite music by Edvard Grieg (1843-1907),<sup>1</sup> seconding so congenially Ibsen's poetic intentions, has greatly popularized this play in spite of the difficulty inherent in its material, in spite, too, of its sundry serious shortcomings and the irremediable sense of tedium evoked by the drawn-out mystifications of the fourth act. The first three acts constitute in effect a tragi-comedy — or como-tragedy — in itself complete; the last act seems slightly inorganic. Grieg's music has certainly much to do with the fact that so many people have come to regard *Peer Gynt* as the national

<sup>1</sup> For Ibsen's interesting instructions in regard to the musical arrangement cf. *C*, p. 269.

drama of the Norwegians much as *Faust* is considered the national drama of the Germans. On the whole, I cannot fall in with the critical consensus which extols *Peer Gynt* as Ibsen's master-work; in fact I cannot help regarding it as one of his minor efforts, created with the poetic energy buoyant, yet somehow slackened. That it failed at first to arouse anything like the enthusiasm occasioned by *Brand* impresses me as not at all surprising. Its rejection, however, on the particular grounds taken by the leading Scandinavian critic, Clemens Petersen (1834-1906), that the new work failed to conform to the accepted rules of æsthetics, was answered in its utter futility in Ibsen's famous letter to his great compatriot, Björnson: "My book *is* poetry; and if it is not, then it will be. The conception of poetry in our country, in Norway, shall be made to conform to the book."<sup>1</sup> In this prophecy perhaps he was slightly in error. For soon he himself faced away from this conception of poetry. On the other hand, the new conception to which he turned instead was indeed not slow to conquer the resistance of Scandinavia, Europe, eventually the whole world. It has revolutionized the art of the actor as well as of the dramatist. Far more than this, it has been one of the prime levers of the social revolution which is still sweeping over us.

<sup>1</sup> *C*, p. 145; cf. for Clemens Petersen's article in *Fædrelandet* the footnote, *ibid.* Ibsen had gone out of his way to commend *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* to the good graces of that well-known critic. Cf. *SNL*, pp. 69-74. He accused Björnson of lukewarmness in defending him against the strictures put upon his work by Petersen and others. Cf. *C*, pp. 144, *f.*, and this led to an estrangement between the two old friends.

## CHAPTER V

### THE LEAGUE OF YOUTH — EMPEROR AND GALILEAN

THE third part of what to all purposes constitutes Ibsen's trilogy on Human Will was a fruit of the Roman sojourn (1864-1868). This was the dramatized story of Emperor Julian the Apostate. The composition was long deferred, however, because of the enormous amount of preparatory studies involved in the task. In the interval the poet's attention was sidetracked from the paths of history and philosophy to that of home politics. *The League of Youth* ("De Unges Forbund," 1869),<sup>1</sup> Ibsen's first open venture in realistic comedy, was a slashing attack on political hypocrisy. Always keenly interested in politics, Ibsen was not at any time "in regular standing" with a political party. With his independent spirit he could not have endured to have his finer feelings of self-esteem continuously jarred and wounded by "party discipline." For any man there may exist concerns of still greater consequence than active care for the affairs of state. To Ibsen the fulfillment of the ego's call was the highest command, and certainly a prolonged participation in practical politics harbors a danger to the moral and intellectual integ-

<sup>1</sup> *The League of Youth* was composed in 1868-69, partly in Berchtesgaden and partly in Dresden; published and first performed in 1869. But the beginnings go back to a much earlier period. Its embryonic form is *Svanhild* (1860), an unfinished comedy in prose. Cf. *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. II, pp. 25-43, and the sketch of 1868, *ibid.*, pp. 207-37.



urity, the peril of creeping paralysis to a man's power of self-determination. A square look at the distributing agencies of public opinion makes one suspect that while the coarser forces rule it might be safer to keep out of the fuss and wrangle of politics, for the preservation of one's courage, conscience, and convictions. At heart Ibsen sided with political freedom as with freedom of conscience in any form, and therefore joined in many of the demands of the Liberals. Indeed, his writings breathe forth the very air of liberty; but as he did not give full-hearted acquiescence to all the views and policies of the Liberal Party, that party arrayed itself against him. So Ibsen stood stigmatized as a conservative by the radicals, while to conservatives he seemed — and, in another sense, really was — a radical of the deepest dye. The truth of the matter is, the Norwegian Liberals disgusted Ibsen by their invertebrate enthusiasm and fertility in flashing phrase as much as by their Gyntian indecision and the tangle of insincerities by which the movement was surrounded. The impression should therefore be corrected that *The League* was an attack on Liberalism. It attacks not the Liberal views, but the Liberal phrase. To be sure Iron-master Bratsberg is represented as a kind and philanthropic employer and as an enemy of sordid greed. But the Conservative Party in its chief representative Lundestad is handled without any more delicacy than is Lawyer Stensgaard, the Liberal *pro tem*. When Ibsen relieves himself in an outburst like, "The Liberals are the worst enemies of freedom,"<sup>1</sup> or lets Thomas Stockmann declare, in *An Enemy of the People*, that the Liberals are the

<sup>1</sup> C, p. 233.



most treacherous enemies of free men<sup>1</sup> he refers to the tyranny of "liberals" in intellectual things. There is more than a grain of truth in his assertion that spiritual and intellectual freedom thrives best under an absolutistic order of government. The arraignment was meant for the sham reformers whose short-ranged vision is a greater obstacle to progress than a reasoned and principled conservatism.

All the same, *The League of Youth* was widely misconstrued as a slashing satire upon the person of Björnstjerne Björnson, the acknowledged leader of the Liberals. Ibsen promptly contradicted the rumor;<sup>2</sup> that is, he denied having caricatured Björnson in the character of Stensgaard. On the other hand, he frankly admitted having used for models "Björnson's pernicious, lie-steeped clique." Like most great leaders, Björnson was surrounded by a bodyguard of obsequious politicians for whom a frank nature like Ibsen's could not profess anything but a blasting contempt. That living models had been in Ibsen's mind, it would have been useless for him to deny. In effect, the artistic value of the comedy is greatly enhanced by the reality of the characters; human factors shine everywhere through the political interests. It would be base slander to seek to establish the identity of a windbag and fraud like Lawyer Stensgaard with the noble figure of Ibsen's generous friend. What lent color of truth to the rumor was the fact that Stensgaard was actually invested with some of Björnson's personal character-

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VIII, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> *C*, p. 179. Yet Mr. Moses, with others, takes the identity for granted; cf. *Henrik Ibsen, The Man and His Plays*, p. 245.

istics. For the poet plainly intended that the worthless fellow, too, should have his redeeming traits. At all events, there resulted a rupture between Norway's two greatest sons. It was patched up for the time being, but soon after that Ibsen gave genuine ground for offense by referring to Björnson in a mordant poem entitled *Nordens Signaler* ("The Northern Signals," 1872)<sup>1</sup> as a political weather-cock, because Björnson had urged Denmark to forget about Schleswig and reconcile herself with Germany.<sup>2</sup>

Stensgaard, the central butt of the satire, is a soul steeped in the Gyntian sort of mendacity; the kind that intoxicates himself with his own vaporings and transiently swindles himself into believing his own phrenetic declamations, like Armado in *Love's Labor's Lost*, a man

That hath a mint of phrases in his brain;  
One whom the music of his own vain tongue  
Doth ravish like enchanting harmony.

Not such a very bad fellow fundamentally, but thoroughly spoiled for good honest work by his spouting eloquence, among other causes. He possesses that elusive quality of "magnetism," which in only too many cases issues from brazen and rock-ribbed self-assurance. On this intangible asset he stakes his claim to a public career, and becomes, like hundreds of other ambitious orators, a cheap, hollow charlatan and political trimmer. One moment the ferocious demagogue, the next moment the champion of the established order. One moment the big brother of the poor, the next moment the little brother of the rich. "Woe to him," once exclaimed Henrik Ibsen, "who has to think of his parents with aversion!" Stensgaard bears a hered-

<sup>1</sup> *SW*, vol. I, pp. 276-78.

itary taint, albeit of a different order from that of Dr. Rank, Brand, Gynt, Oswald, Rebecca, etc. His is a servile and venal nature, to be had for any sop thrown to his ambition. A dinner invitation from the local magnate overthrows his radical convictions. His life, even in its most sacred privacies, is to be ordered with a single eye to profit and preferment; marriage is to serve him as a lever to wealth, station, and influence; accordingly a single glance into a luxurious household determines him to marry the daughter. By the irony of fate, and not perchance by the eternal fitness of things, the ardent pretender to popularity and favor manages to fall down midway between the several chairs of ease which he has put in place for himself. His pitiable undoing is not meant as a blazing judgment against unrighteousness, but simply goes to show that Stensgaard is as yet too green to beat in the game of politics. Many an aspiring politician felt himself hit by the reverberating shot Ibsen had fired. A tempest of indignation and ill-will broke over the performance of the play in Christiania. And so this capital comedy, which by its dash and go and irresistible merriment completely refutes the inveterate superstition that Ibsen lacked humor (as though without this precious possession he could have had so much sympathy with the wrongs and foibles of men!) missed its highly deserved success. But even had the response been different, Ibsen would not have been influenced in the choice of his further course. The sphere of strictly political comedy would in any case have proved too narrow for his genius, already bound for the much wider sphere of the social drama.

*The League of Youth* is technically far in advance of its author's previous efforts. So far as the structural qualities go, the almost inextricable tangle of mistakes, misunderstandings, and surprises attests the still prevalent influence of Scribe. By marked contrast to the more or less conventional comiery of the situations the originality of the coming technique announces itself. The realistic method of presentment evolved by conscientious experiment is now for the first time in Ibsen's grasp. The action is managed without monologues and without a single occurrence of the "aside" and the "stage-whisper." The dialogue is in prose and follows much the natural mode of conversation. To us, such features in drama offer not the least matter for surprise; but upon the audience of 1869, sufficiently enraged by the satirical intent of the play, the daring formal innovation produced an effect like an extra insult thrown in with the injury.

After an uncommonly prolonged incubation, the "world-tragedy" *Emperor and Galilean* ("Kejser og Galilæer," 1873) was finished.<sup>1</sup> The theme, as has been mentioned, had stirred the poet ever since his arrival in Italy.<sup>2</sup> Already in 1864 he prepared to write a tragedy on the Apostate.<sup>3</sup> The subject was taken up again in 1866, casually, and more vigorously once more in 1870, while Ibsen resided at Dresden. It was planned (till 1872) to be a trilogy<sup>3</sup> consisting of (1) *Julian and the Philosophers* (in three acts), (2) *Julian's Apostasy* (in three acts), (3) *Julian on the Imperial Throne* (in five acts). Eventually the bulky

<sup>1</sup> On the genesis and completion of *Emperor and Galilean*, cf. *C*, pp. 117, 121, 185, 206, 215, 222, 236, 239, 245, 249-50, 267, 269, 280.

<sup>2</sup> *C*, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> *C*, pp. 236 and particularly 243.

material was compressed into two parts of five acts each, Part First, *Cæsar's Apostasy* ("Cæsars Frafald"), Part Second, *The Emperor Julian* ("Kejser Julian").

In Ibsen's own estimation — yet great men are fallible in appraising their own achievements — this was the greatest of all his works. By it he meant to confute those critics who denied to him a "positive" world-view, as many are doing with too much emphasis to this day. For this purpose the drama was to body forth a doctrine. A dramatist's right to externalize his philosophy in any fit form may pass unchallenged. Yet there is no getting beyond the critical questions, Is the philosophy wholly inwoven in the action, incarnate in the persons? Does it shine forth from the characters, or does it only shimmer and flicker through them from an outer source of light? Ibsen speaks with fair assurance on the subject. "There is in the character of Julian, as in most that I have written during my riper years, more of my own spiritual experience than I care to acknowledge to the public. But it is at the same time an entirely realistic piece of work. The figures stood solidly before my eyes in the light of their time — and I hope they will so stand before the reader's eyes." <sup>1</sup>

Intent on putting the greatest possible amount of truthfulness into the portrayal of Græco-Roman life, he expended for once a vast deal of painstaking, minute study. Nevertheless the great drama cannot be said to be historically truthful, save as to exteriors and incidentals. The figure of the protagonist is decidedly misdrawn. Ibsen would have done well to abide by the verdict of the historian Negri, who pronounced Julian

<sup>1</sup> C, p. 255.



"a Puritan in the purple, morally too Christian to be a Christian of the fourth century church." Ibsen treated the character of Julian with willful injustice, portraying him as a monstrously conceited degenerate, without sense, balance, or even the semblance of royal dignity. This raving Cæsaro-maniac seems more fit for a Punch and Judy show than for a "world-tragedy," as Ibsen termed his drama. An oddly compounded dilettante<sup>1</sup> is this Julian, seemingly playing a burlesque on the historic emperor.<sup>2</sup> The latter perished as the victim of the final contest between two moral constitutions battling in his soul for the dominion of the future. That, too, was Ibsen's view of his hero, but what he brought forth was the sheer miscarriage of a grand poetical conception. To tell the truth, the playwright had undertaken what lay outside the province of his craft. As a rule his persons are firmly established in their character. Brandes says rightly that the action only serves to test and prove the immutability of the *dramatis personæ*. (Only it should be added to this estimate that we do not see all their potentialities at the first glance.) Now in *Emperor and Galilean* the attempt is made to trace the gradual transformation of the entire character of the hero: an attempt that ended in dismal failure. For the character does not progress and develop, but perpetually flutters and flounders. Julian is utterly without a directing self-consciousness. Everlastingly boggling over the freedom of his will, he is withal grossly superstitious. Caught in the mesh of events, he would

<sup>1</sup> Especially in his philosophical divagations throughout both parts of the tragedy.

<sup>2</sup> Notably in Part II, Act II, Sc. 1.



propitiate the gods, pray and sacrifice to them. "To what gods? I will sacrifice to this God and that God — one or the other must surely hear me. I *must* call on something without me and above me."<sup>1</sup> In his habitual state of confusion he becomes a chronic client of the oracles. When they withhold their counsel, he becomes despondent and whines: "To stand so entirely alone!" Like Peer Gynt he strives after his own satisfaction, seeks to be "enough to himself." Since in drama there can be no hero without the potentiality of deeds, Julian is utterly unsuited to his task. He excites our curiosity and pity, but even the outcry wrung from him at his final collapse, that historic admission, "Thou hast conquered, Galilean," comes too late to save him our respect.

*Emperor and Galilean* stands in a patent dialectic relation to *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*. Together they form a species of psychological trilogy. Unavoidably we are driven to employ the Hegelian notation in pointing out this inner connectedness. *Brand*, then, stands for the "thesis," here carried to the point of self-contradiction which any single idea will reach if pursued to its fullest lengths. In *Peer Gynt* the antithesis is sharply stated; in *Emperor and Galilean* the opposition of the positive and the negative poles of truth is succeeded by the higher synthesis of truth. This process of reasoning, Hegel designates as the "Trichotomy." Characteristically for Ibsen's philosophical allegiance the tripartite logic pervades also *Emperor and Galilean* by itself, outside of any association with other plays. This drama, Ibsen confessed, was not the first he had written in Germany, but indeed the first he wrote

<sup>1</sup> Vol. v, p. 458.

under the influence of German intellectual life.<sup>1</sup> The special philosophical theme of *Emperor and Galilean*, as over against *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, to put it with extreme conciseness, is the freedom of will. In all probability Ibsen culled the main conceptions from Schopenhauer, but he lent them new emotional values.

The philosophical foundation of Ibsen's "world-drama" is, moreover, almost identical with the metaphysics underlying the work of his great predecessor in the practical reform of the drama, Friedrich Hebbel (1813-1863). Both poets postulate the regnancy supreme and absolute of a "Weltwille," a will inherent in the universe. On the philosophical plane of *Emperor and Galilean*, Ibsen, like Hebbel, attributes to the world an intelligent self-direction. Judged, then, from a posited consciousness of our union with the world-will, events must be regarded by us not as the haphazards of blind fate, but rather as volitional acts of the universal Ego. But the volitional freedom of the world's self-consciousness, translated into individual conduct, spells necessity. Now, inasmuch as the progress and betterment of the world is achieved through the instrumentality of men with a strong "will,"—both Hebbel and Ibsen, the latter in particular, are hero-worshippers,—this philosophy would seem to lead into a dilemma: we are unfree, as to our will, yet freedom of will is our criterion of worth. The contradiction here in the conception of the heroic personality as a man of action, yet not a free agent, is, of course, not confined to drama, but founded in life itself. The only escape from the dilemma lies in the belief that nature implants the power of will in men in order to

<sup>1</sup> *C*, p. 413; *SNL*, p. 109.

bend it to her own, often recondite, means. An individual rebelling against the will of the world is none the less fulfilling an assigned task. He does not choose to do but what a superior power compels him to choose. Mr. Shaw, in his *Quintessence of Ibsenism*, obfuscates what has been called the "Pantragism" of this philosophy<sup>d</sup> by the following comment: "It was something for Julian to have seen that the power which he found stronger than his individual will was itself will; but inasmuch as he conceived it, not as the whole of which his will was but a part, but as a rival will, he was not the man to found the Third Empire."

"What is the way of freedom?" asks the eager Julian.<sup>1</sup> "The God-Emperor or Emperor-God," declares Maximus the Sage, "comes into being in the man *who wills himself*."<sup>2</sup> He who wills, conquers. Yet the parting words are, "To will is to have to will,"<sup>3</sup> and, "I believe in free necessity." Nature makes us will precisely what she wants of us. Accordingly, the tragic hero is invariably in the right, world-philosophically considered. And the beyond-good-and-evil position is reached from a totally different intellectual springboard from that from which Nietzsche took the leap; as when Maximus declares, "Sin lies only in thy sense of sinfulness."<sup>4</sup> Here we have another proof, if one were needed, that the Overman was born into the world of thought a long time before the hermit of Sils-Maria proclaimed him. In Ibsen he is prefigured almost from the earliest dramatic attempts.<sup>5</sup> This, however, it is worth while to remember: Ibsen's "Third Empire," of which

<sup>1</sup> Vol. v, p. 112. <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 374. <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 479. <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the comment on Bishop Nicholas Arnesson, pp. 51-52.

there is so much question in *Emperor and Galilean*, is, essentially a collectivist, not individualist, Utopia.

Hebbel used a very telling phrase for the infinitely recurring, self-wrecking revolt of the individual against the will of the world; viewing the spectacle as a progressive experiment in education *per contra*, he describes it as the "Selbstkorrektur" of the world, meaning its continuous experimental self-improvement. This concept is also wrought into Nietzsche's philosophy. In his famous theory of the "Wiederkunft des Gleichen" ("Eternal Recurrence")<sup>6</sup> there reëmerges the same notion which we find stated in the second part of *Emperor and Galilean* by the philosopher Maximus: "There is one who ever reappears at certain intervals, in the course of human history. He is like a rider taming a wild horse in the arena. Again and yet again it throws him. A moment, and he is in the saddle again, each time more secure and more expert; but off he has had to go, in all his varying incarnations, until this day. Off he had to go as the God-created man in Eden's grove; off he had to go as the founder of the world-empire; off he must go as the prince of the empire of God. Who knows how often he has wandered among us when none have recognized him? How know you, Julian, that you were not in him whom you now persecute?"<sup>17</sup> Hebbel and Ibsen coincide in the opinion that the march of civilization is regulated by the needs of the times and the preparedness of the people. Yet the levers of progress are the great personalities. Without them we have either stagnation or a stunted, one-sided civilization.

There is no help for our dwelling still further on the

<sup>1</sup> Vol. v, p. 393.

philosophical thought of the double drama, but fortunately it is possible to indicate its drift by uncommented quotation.

Thus speaks Julian among the philosophers: "You know only two streets in Athens, the street to the schools, and the street to the Church; of the third street, toward Eleusis and further, you know naught."<sup>1</sup> In this metaphor, the street to the schools signifies paganism, the street to the Church, Christianity. What is meant by the "street toward Eleusis"? The philosopher Maximus, who kindles in Julian's soul the conflict between the worship of God and self-deification, prophesies a golden age. He confidently predicts the crumbling of the two empires that have gone before; the classic and the romantic world-conception, as we may call them, will be superseded by a new world-ruling religion which shall rear its nobler structure on the ruins of both the old. Three empires were to have sway in their turn. "First that empire which was founded on the tree of knowledge; then that which was founded on the tree of the cross. The third is the empire of the great mystery; that empire which shall be founded on the tree of knowledge and the tree of the cross together, because it hates and loves them both, and because it has its living sources under Adam's grove and under Golgotha."<sup>2</sup> Again, Stirner's and Nietzsche's "gay science" is forestalled: "Where is God? In Olympus? On the cross?" Maximus answers, "No: in my own self. The third empire belongs to him who *wills*." Clearly the poet agreed with Lessing's estimate of the "revealed" religions as so many instruments for the gradual "Education of

<sup>1</sup> Vol. v, pp. 106-07.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.



the Human Race," each being in keeping with its requirements for the time being. The "Third Empire" can be ushered in only by a race developed beyond the present status of humanity. Only then can the contrast between pagan Beauty and Christian Truth be resolved in a higher unity. Neither Julian nor his generation was ripe for this final synthesis of Truth and Beauty. Julian's palpable mission was to regenerate Christianity as he found it. He permitted, instead, his deep disappointment in the Church to grow into hatred of the religion. Then step by step he advanced in the belief that he himself, not the Galilean, was God. His relapse from Christianity is conceived as a crime against humanity, whose natural progress was greatly retarded by such retrogression. His was the power and opportunity of ushering in the "Third Empire"; — he spurned and repudiated his mission and wrought tragic mischief in the world. This explains why Ibsen attributed a world-historic importance to Julian's apostasy from the Faith. In this spirit Maximus chides the Apostate. "You have striven to make the youth a child again. The empire of the flesh is swallowed up in the empire of the spirit. But the empire of the spirit is not final, any more than the youth is. You have striven to hinder the growth of youth — to hinder him from becoming a man. Oh, fool, who have drawn your sword against that which is to be — against the third empire, in which the twin-natured shall reign."<sup>1</sup>

*Emperor and Galilean* met with no enthusiastic reception either from the critics or the public.<sup>o</sup> Ibsen's *opus maximum*, as he believed it to be, it certainly is not. In

<sup>1</sup> Vol. v, p. 372.



project it was his most ambitious enterprise, in execution it is perhaps the weakest among all the works of his ripened experience. Its obvious faults are these: It is too long-drawn-out, especially in the second part. The poet himself, as a consequence, betrayed his weariness of the task. It appeals mainly to the intellect, and yet its meaning dives frequently into obscurity.<sup>h</sup> And the characters are not sufficiently vitalized, so that we are taken aback both by their inconsistencies and their self-contradictions. Most serious of all, a cloud of mysticism hangs over the events, — reality is constantly melting into allegory, as was already the case to a minor degree in *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*. In a technical respect also the play is unsuited to the stage. In the second part there occur no less than eighteen scenic changes, many of which are uncalled for. But with all its shortcomings and blemishes, *Emperor and Galilean* is a solid and noble component in the structure of the modern drama on which the master builder was energetically at work. By this time the foundations were laid, and the walls of the building were rising. Already it was possible to estimate the area covered, but the future height of the edifice could not easily be guessed.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE POET AS MORALIST

A NEW phase of artistic growth and development confronts us now as we pass from the romantic-historical dramas of Ibsen to the stately series of his sociological plays, — we may fitly call them so, — opening with *Pillars of Society*.

After *Brand*, Ibsen's literary position was firmly grounded, so far as Scandinavia was concerned. At that time, however, there was no thought of his subsequent significance for the social, moral, and artistic progress of his age. The period up to his removal from Norway appears in retrospect as one of initiation and apprenticeship. The theatres of Bergen and Christiania were the workshops where he obtained facility in wielding the tools of his craft. The following dozen years developed his art to its full maturity.

His fame was spreading through Europe. George Brandes had probably been the first critic to devote a whole essay to Ibsen's work.<sup>a</sup> England and Germany made his acquaintance in the same year, 1872. Mr. Edmund Gosse introduced him to the English, through the offices of the *Spectator*. In Germany a commercial traveler named P. F. Siebold did his best, through articles and translations, to make Ibsen widely known. Adolf Strodtmann (1829-1879) translated *The Pretenders* and *The League of Youth* (both in 1872). The first play done into

English was *Emperor and Galilean* (1876), by Katherine Ray. In the same year the celebrated players of the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen produced *The Pretenders* and *The Vikings*. Yet these conquests were small, foreshowing in nothing the prodigious influence and vogue of Ibsen in Germany, which dates from the year 1877. In that year he launched a practically new form of drama, which met with instant recognition from many progressive-minded persons, especially from the brilliant trio, Julius Hoffory, a Dane by birth, lecturer in the University of Berlin, and Otto Brahm and Paul Schlenther, conspicuous leaders then and to-day in the reform of the drama. They became sponsors for Ibsen in Germany just as the actor-manager, Lugné-Poë (husband of the great actress Suzanne Després), Count Moriz Prozor, and Mr. André Antoine, organizer of the Théâtre Libre, made him popular in France. From this time on he advanced step by step, through the most conscientious exercise of his gifts, to the undisputed position of the chief dramatist of his age and one of the greatest of all time. Beside the plays which he produced from 1877 to about 1900, most of the earlier plays dwindle into obscure insignificance. Ibsen illustrates as few other poets do the practical value of hard study.

We must remember that the social problem plays were begun when the poet was nearing his fiftieth year. His genius began its highest climb at an age when all other great dramatists had passed their summit of excellence. He brought to the task not only the ripeness of experience, force, and power, but an astonishing capacity for further growth. In an address made September 10, 1874, to an audience of enthusiastic university students, he delivered

the lesson of his prolonged apprenticeship by dealing thus with the crucial question, What is Poetry? "Not till late in life have my eyes been opened to the fact that to be a poet means as much as to be a seer; but, mark well, to see in such a way that the things seen are shown to the public as the poet has seen them. Now it is a fact that only those things can be thus seen and assimilated which are a part of our experience. And this experience is the secret of modern poetry. All I have written during the past decade is part of my spiritual experience." <sup>1</sup> And this further observation explains perhaps adequately his ultimate conquest of public favor: "No writer makes his experience alone. Whatever he has perceived in life, his countrymen have likewise perceived." <sup>2</sup> By these words Ibsen's priority in many of the opinions whose author he is reputed to have been is inferentially disclaimed. A great writer need not be an "original" thinker. His primary social service and intellectual mission is to articulate the thought and spirit of his time, not necessarily to evolve it. Perhaps none of the ideas promulgated in the works of Henrik Ibsen are, strictly speaking, original with him. They are the floating notions of an age, caught while yet invisible or indistinct to the mass of men, and made palpable by a creative touch. In Ibsen the leading tendencies of the new age became collectively conscious of themselves. He had the rare courage to state their meaning with fullest force. Such constitutes the social importance of Henrik Ibsen's writings.

Does it not seem incongruous that this hardened recluse, who used to frighten away bold visitors with a

<sup>1</sup> *SW*, vol. I, p. 522; *SNL*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

harsh request for "Arbeitsruhe" (Ibsen resembled Schopenhauer as much in the rudeness of his temper as he resembled him physiognomically); this eremitical old grumbler who, much like a hedge-hog, was forever turning a spiky panoply of self-defense against the surrounding amenities, — that he, of all men, should have been absorbed so deeply in the cause of social betterment? Or what other than a philanthropic purpose could he have had in dealing in such a homiletic strain with major problems of life? True, Ibsen confined himself to criticism. He did not undertake to solve the great problems; he was content to state them. He realized that in our social canon the rules have been more or less upset. The old principles have gone into decay. New principles are wanted. But before these can be clearly and cleanly crystallized out of the confusion of conflicting interests, an accurate analysis of our situation is requisite.<sup>b</sup>

Ibsen wisely refrains from submitting an elaborate plan for the reform of society. For him it suffices to show up, by a set of striking illustrations from life, the extant maladjustments, and the generally unconfessed impotence of our long-existent and somewhat worn religious, political, and social ideals. In the frank acknowledgment of their nonefficacy resides the first condition of a wholesomer state. The reorganization, however, calls for a radical moral change which can come but slowly, with generations. Ibsen was of the firm belief that "the ideals of our time as they pass away are tending to that which in my drama of *Emperor and Galilean* I have designated as the Third Empire."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *SW*, vol. I, p. 528; *SNL*, p. 57.



The fact that Ibsen would write no general recipe for our multitude of ills has been fatuously interpreted as a demonstration of ignorance or ill-will. He simply would not descend to the paltry wisdom of the quack. Earnest moralist that he was and scorner of popularity, he dispensed and advertised no soothing platitudes. How can human standards be raised? When a man holds the crowd cheap, and, besides, is a believer in heredity, he cannot conscientiously extol the infallible virtue of unlimited multiplication.

Is there, indeed, any hope of our reclamation? Were Ibsen a pessimist, he would straightway say *no*, for he recognizes the evil as ancient, deep-seated, and general. Yet to his intrinsically optimistic outlook the evil is not ineradicable. Hence he answers *yes*; not with an optimistic yell, but by resolutely shouldering a heavy share in the work. Why is it, now, asks he, that human society is not yet spiritually energized by the prescript and example of all these centuries during which a very large portion of mankind has willingly subscribed to one and the same moral code?

As a mere "working hypothesis" let us throw out the suggestion that perhaps that very ancientness and ubiquity militates against the value of our so-called ideals. Our moral energy is in a measure paralyzed by dead formulas. They were for the most part made for the use of a long since defunct order of society. Laws are the heirlooms of the race. Though their pragmatic value may be gone, we keep on wearing them like jewels of splendid antique uselessness. Brilliantly reset and furbished up, they add much lustre to the wearer at a very small incon-



venience. Their obsolescence is disguised and they are made to look as good as new, unless, indeed, their very antiqueness adds to their value in the market another element, like threadbare places in an Oriental rug. All moral commandments, not excepting a fraction of the very Decalogue, have thus been tinkered and tampered with. Doctrines are attenuated by sophistry. As a result they are rendered conveniently ambiguous and much less binding, since rules of conduct that are not perfectly intelligible either need not or actually cannot be practiced.' In consequence of this, society is left without any firm ethical guidance. The old coins have lost their faces, and are no better than mere "counters" in the game. We discredit the old appraisements, yet continue to dole out the worn coinage instead of paying out our own created values. The question is, Does the metal then still ring true or are our ideals no better than currency debased, or counterfeit? Ibsen, properly understood, finds our gold is still genuine. That gold is the truth within us, which must be dug up from under the rubbish of hypocrisy. We need to be regenerated from within. Without that, liberative measures, be they even revolutions, are of no avail.

Meanwhile, the world has become accustomed to compound with its conscience. Let us instance the *casus conscientiae* in its widest occurrence. We talk as much as ever, and as glibly and sentimentally, about the saving grace of brotherly love; and after a fashion we do practice the commandment that we should love our neighbor. But will any self-respecting business man hold up his head and declare, of a week day and in business hours, that his

affairs are being conducted without shifts and evasions on this or any other undilutedly Christian principle? Reasoned belief in principles is uncommon amongst us. Our fathers, in the words of a witty cynic, have exhausted the faith-faculty of the species. All the same, we continue to enjoin the scriptural mandates upon others equal unto ourselves in unbelief. To every honest mind the question must suggest itself: If you do not really believe in the Biblical counsels to the full extent of their terms, — and you really do not, — is it not your duty to decide and declare what principles you are willing to live up to without gloss or quibble? Mrs. Alving, in *Ghosts*, states a constitutional difficulty. "We all are ghosts," she avers. "Not only are our souls haunted by those things which we have inherited from father and mother, we are haunted also by all conceivable old and dead opinions and all sorts of old dead doctrine, and so forth. These things do not *live* within us, but just the same they have settled in us and we cannot rid ourselves of them."<sup>1</sup> These *revenants* of the past, in other words, our accumulated race and family experience, obstruct our mental and moral independence. Now the chief employment of Ibsen's genius is an abateless effort to bring about a greater solidarity of practice and profession. In our time the feeling has been growing among the thoughtful that to save idealism from the danger of inanition it is needful to inject into it some real, actual, practical beliefs. Our hope lies in the evolution of new ideas and energies. Certainly the self-stultification of the professional champion of the "eternal verities" could not go farther than it does in

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VII, p. 225. The simile occurs already in an early draft of *Pillars of Society*. Cf. *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, p. 37.

*Ghosts* when a minister of the established church proudly emphasizes the diametrical opposition of his official ideals to the requirements of truth. This happens when Mrs. Alving's question, "But what about the truth?" is clinched by Pastor Manders's well-meaning rejoinder: "But what about the ideals?"<sup>1</sup>

Ibsen believes in the inseparableness and ultimate identity of truth and the ideals. Hence he is *par excellence* the poet of truthfulness, and the most vehement, consistent, and formidable denunciator of the "conventional lie"; in this condemnation he is at one with his most ferocious, and blindest, enemy, Max Nordau.<sup>4</sup>

The social philosophy of Ibsen is expressed in the dramas which we are about to discuss; its leading tenets reveal themselves spontaneously as we follow from play to play, step by step, Ibsen's ethical development through the three phases of growth made visible in his works. He began with a general attack all along the line, — the State, the Church, all social organization should be broken up. The second stage was devoted to the enthronement of the Individual, the apotheosis of the Egotist, the cult of the Superman. In his final phase, however, Ibsen sets his hope on the *socialization* of the developed individual. It is well to remember that in a general way the socio-ethical code of Ibsen derives its inspiration from the teaching of Charles Darwin, with whose *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man* he had been familiar since the early seventies.<sup>6</sup> *Pillars of Society* is the overture to Ibsen's social criticism. Here may be discerned virtually all the *motifs* worked out in the later dramas.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VII, p. 222.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE NEW BOURGEOIS TRAGEDY

WHEN *Pillars of Society* was first produced on the stage, it was felt to be a bold innovation,<sup>a</sup> and it is hardly too much to say of this now superannuated piece that, for Germany at least, it proved a most important point of departure in the regeneration of the drama. In order to appreciate this historic importance it seems advisable to go briefly into the past history of the special *genre* to which *Pillars of Society*, together with most of the plays that followed, belongs, namely, the drama of middle-class life.

The *bourgeois* tragedy sprang up in various countries in the course of the eighteenth century, partly in protest against the "classical" or "heroic" type of drama, which had firmly established its monopoly of the serious stage through the prestige of its ancestry in the "golden ages" of Greece, England, and France. In the three principal countries concerned, it was given a good start by George Lillo (1693–1739; *George Barnwell*, 1731), Denis Diderot (1713–1784; *Le Père de Famille*, published 1758), and G. E. Lessing (1729–1781), but not much came of these auspicious beginnings. Leastways in Germany, where after writing *Miss Sara Sampson* (1755) Lessing again deserted the cause. Schiller (1759–1805) made a significant new start with *Kabale und Liebe* (1784), yet later he subjected the middle-class drama to ridicule. From the *bourgeois*

play in prose he swerved to historical drama in verse.<sup>b</sup> This was not really strange, considering what had happened to the new *genre* at the hands of its principal cultivators, A. W. Iffland (1759–1814) and Aug. von Kotzebue (1761–1819). It had become an object of mechanical exploitation. The next dramatist of great stature to renew the efforts in behalf of *bourgeois* tragedy was Friedrich Hebbel; but his art, too, did not dwell long in those precincts. Maybe his apostasy was due to the obsession under which he labored, namely, that the tragedy of middle-class life consists mainly in the limitations peculiar to the narrowing existence of ordinary people, or, as he puts it, that the tragedy in common circles springs “from the rigid exclusiveness with which the individuals, wholly incapable of dialectics, stand opposed to one another in the limited sphere, and from their consequent terrible enslavement to a partial existence.”<sup>c</sup> Nine years after *Maria Magdalene* (1844) at least one forceful dramatist had the courage to follow in Hebbel’s footsteps. This was Otto Ludwig (1813–1865), in his *Erbförster* (1853). Numerous other attempts followed — e.g., Gustav Freytag’s (1816–1895) *Die Valentine* (1847) and *Graf Waldemar* (1848), but none of them were of sufficient strength and weight to make more than a passing impression in the evolution of modern drama. The tragic conflicts in the plays of that earlier period (say 1840–1870) echoed, as a rule, — and that a rule almost without exception, — the antagonism between separated classes of society and their religious, political, and national strifes and struggles. The tragedy in fact consisted in the entrance of these outside conflicts into the precincts



of domestic life. But the year 1870 created a new social basis for German literature. As a result of the gradual growth of social organization, the olden theme, "Sie konnten zusammen nicht kommen," the obstacles to the intermarriage of people belonging to different social strata have ceased to play the dominant rôle, as formerly in *Kabale und Liebe*. New social questions, affecting under diverse aspects all classes of society alike, and presaging the natural transition from one established order of things to another, took hold of the people and were only waiting for authoritative spokesmen. Such a part was now assumed all at once by Henrik Ibsen. And he was daring enough to move those questions out of their platonic vagueness to the threshold of action, and to deepen, as Edgar Steiger has it, questions of the hour into questions of life. Brandes, pointing out that in our age political conflicts have been largely superseded by social questions, undertakes to group Ibsen's *motifs* along with the problems of modern life, as follows: (1) Problems relating to religion; (2) the clash between Past and Present; (3) social life; rich and poor, dependents and independents; (4) the sexes in their social and erotic relation, woman's emancipation.<sup>d</sup>

Undoubtedly one reason for Ibsen's adherence to the Norwegian *milieu*, even long after he could look to the theatre of all Europe and had become really more intimate with social conditions in Germany than in Norway, was the constitution of society in his country, where a comparative freedom from class complications facilitated the writer's concentration upon essential problems. Ibsen is, to my knowledge, the only great writer in history



who entirely dispensed with heroes in armor or uniform, and managed the feat, apparently so impossible for English literary workers, of doing dramatic business without the decorative assistance of tufts and titles. In the absence of a titled aristocracy in his native land, this was a merit only in so far as he might have easily domiciled his plots elsewhere, had his aim been to please a snobbish public.

Ibsen, as a true *bourgeois* tragedian, views and judges society neither from below nor from above, but from the same level. Instead of studying the sins of the proletariat, as certain great contemporary dramatists, notably of Germany and Russia, or arraigning the vices and falsehoods of high life, as now and then even an English playwright will venture to do, he addresses his moral inquiries and accusations to the very broad stratum of upper middle-class society. Lawyers, doctors, ministers, merchants, officials, teachers, artists, landed proprietors, shipowners, tradesmen, manufacturers, — these, and persons of still other callings, people the social world of Ibsen's dramas on terms of entire equality before their creator. A survey of this *mixtum compositum* does not reveal any resemblance to the stereotyped figures of stage-land to which in this country we are still so desperately accustomed. The characters are rarely "charged"; each has a sharply stamped personality, and the "type," so far as it is extant, is apt to be concealed under a profusion of purely individual features and peculiarities. Nevertheless a certain correspondence is perceptible between their moral complexions and the vocations they follow, and Ibsen's sympathies and prejudices betray themselves in his different

attitudes towards representatives of this or that occupation. This may be shown inductively, without particularizing too far.

Among the so-called liberal professions, the medical receives at Ibsen's hand the most favorable certificate. Dr. Wangel (*The Lady from the Sea*), the only physician found near the foreground of a plot, is one of his noblest conceptions of male character. Dr. Herdal (*The Master Builder*), in a minor part, has also the full approval of the poet, and so has Dr. Fieldbo (*The League of Youth*); the pathetic Dr. Rank (*A Doll's House*) does not forfeit our respect in a very ticklish situation, and even the shipwrecked, drifting Dr. Relling (*The Wild Duck*) is employed humanely, according to his lights.

The schoolmasters and scholars constitute a more mixed company. On the one hand, the even-tempered, reliable Arnholm (*The Lady from the Sea*); the well-meaning and, on the whole, well-balanced Alfred Allmers (*Little Eyolf*). On the other hand, the pedantic, pettily useful George Tesman (*Hedda Gabler*); "Adjunkt" Rör-lund (*Pillars of Society*) and still more Rector Kroll (*Rosmersholm*) stand for the pinched narrowness of official schoolmasterdom; the same is true of the schoolmaster in *Peer Gynt* (the dissolute geniuses Lövborg (*Hedda Gabler*) and Brendel (*Rosmersholm*) are disqualified for inclusion in this or any class of workers). Women teachers are treated with distinct favor: Martha Bernick (*Pillars of Society*), Petra Stockmann (*An Enemy of the People*), Asta Allmers (*Little Eyolf*).

For lawyers Ibsen shows an unconcealed dislike. Only a few of them actually enter his plots in person, — Torvald

Helmer (*A Doll's House*), attorney-general for the social correctitudes, the hollow-hearted sensualist Brack (*Hedda Gabler*), and the unprincipled ambitionist Stensgaard (*Love's Comedy*); conjecturally the whole tribe are branded as anti-idealists. Ibsen holds that the law breeds casuists and sophists.

The clergy comes off even worse. Of all professions theirs is the only one the members of which approximate in the manner of their portraiture a preconceived type, on Ibsen's stage. Nearly all of them are spokesmen of a narrow-minded, inflexible morality. Pastor Strawman (*Love's Comedy*) is the all-too-familiar shepherd of souls whose eye is forever riveted on his daily bread-and-butter. His colleague in *Peer Gynt* is not much better. Pastor Manders (*Ghosts*) is an astonishing old child with a blundering ignorance of the very rudiments of human nature. (According to Ibsen, the study of theology is injurious to the higher intellect.)<sup>1</sup> The drunkard Molvik (*The Wild Duck*) shows up the minister in a state of degeneracy. Lastly, Brand is surely a devout idealist, but his fanatical worship of pain neutralizes his powers for righteousness, and his sincerity becomes his worst vice. It would seem as though the average minister were not classed by Ibsen as a useful member of society.

Politicians and journalists are held in still lower esteem. They are represented as self-seeking, shifty opportunists, e.g., Mortensgaard (*Love's Comedy*, *Rosmersholm*). Apart from *Love's Comedy*, the flippant "musical tragedy" *Norma* expresses most unequivocally Ibsen's opinion of politicians.<sup>2</sup> What he thought of the average newspaper-

<sup>1</sup> *C*, p. 349.

<sup>2</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, pp. 21-31.

man is plainly hinted in the following bit of acrimonious pleasantry, *à propos* of the subject of vivisection: "Scientists should not be allowed to torture animals to death. Let the physicians experiment upon newspapermen and politicians." <sup>1</sup>

At least two other social groups sort themselves out among the personnel of Ibsen's dramas. There are, on the one hand, the *existences ratées*, men like the vagabond philosopher Ulrik Brendel (*Rosmersholm*), who have been thrown out of the swim and are helplessly drifting down the stream of life. This intellectual proletariat attracts representatives from many different callings and social connections. Dr. Relling (*The Wild Duck*) belongs to it, as do at least two of his "patients," the "demonic" Molvik and Ekdal Senior. Among these moral bankrupts are to be included the branded outcasts who have paid the legal penalty for their own or another culprit's infraction of the law: old Lieutenant Ekdal and Nils Krogstad are conspicuous specimens of the class. As a remote congener of these "lame ducks" that flap idly about in their puddles one might name the Jack-of-all-trades Ballested (*The Lady from the Sea*), whose range of talent enables him to paint signs or portraits with the same skill and satisfaction. On the other hand, we have the achievers of practical success. While they may be taken from the professional class (Helmer) or the world of art (Solness, Rubek), the completest expression of the type is the powerful man of business, the "Captain of Industry." Peer Gynt in one of his transformations, Bernick, above all John Gabriel Borkman, occur at once as the best

<sup>1</sup> *SW*"', vol. I, p. 206.

examples. Rich men, with Ibsen, are seldom honest men, but grasping, unscrupulous egoists. "Men of might" are as a rule mere self-seekers who make the public, so far as is necessary or politic, a limited partner in their success, and who delude the world — occasionally themselves also — into believing they are moved solely by a desire for "the power to create human happiness in wide, wide circles around them," — as John Gabriel Borkman representatively puts it.

Ibsen's attitude to these various classes of people accounts in no small measure for the common exception taken to his plays. In the words of a keen American critic of society, "There is no doubt whatever from the point of view of the best families, the solid citizens, those 'whom the nation delights to honor,' and the 'backbone of this republic,' that the spirit of an Ibsen play is immoral, indecent, perverse, and morbid. It was his purpose to have it so. Indeed, people are not nearly so uncomfortable as he meant them to be." <sup>e</sup>

*Pillars of Society* ("Samfundets Støtter," 1877) has a satirical sting in its very title. Society is viewed under the likeness of a rickety structure resting on props that are hollow with decay. It is a theme full of intense actuality. Ibsen's interest is switched off from the Byronic or romantic sort of hero — like Brand — to one of a completely modern stamp.<sup>f</sup> Consul Bernick in our drama has reached his eminence by a fairly complete assortment of commending qualities. He presents himself as an enterprising but strictly honorable man of business, a public-spirited citizen, a pious churchman, and of course a blameless husband and exemplary father, in short, a per-



fect model of respectability, fairly redolent of civic and private virtues. Is there a place where merits like his go unrewarded, unless they be shyly hidden from the world? Skien or Bergen is not that place. Karsten Bernick has made a thorough success of his life. He is rich, respected, influential, in fact the "first citizen" of the town and surrounding country, — a mainstay forsooth of the social order. Yet this so splendidly envired existence of the local man of might is utterly hollow because all its achievements are erected on a foundation of lies. Bernick owes his elevation to hypocrisy, which, according to Rochefoucauld, is the tribute that vice pays to virtue. By the slow, tremendously effective workings of the analytical method the sacerdotal robes of this high priest of the social religion are stripped one by one till at last he is dragged forth to the public gaze in his cold and naked wolfishness. The shortest way to material success, as illustrated by Bernick's case, is ruthlessness, the moralist to the contrary notwithstanding. His is the capitalistic secret of making the public interest his own.<sup>9</sup> A railroad is to be built in the district; Bernick works up a sentiment in opposition to the project. A year after that he promotes the same object with ardor, because in the mean time he has bought up the land abutting on this railway. A man who has climbed to his position in the public esteem over the prostrate lives and fortunes of his best friends; who has not scrupled to besmirch and wreck the reputation of a self-sacrificing benefactor; a man who has coolly bartered away the happiness of three human beings in order to give himself a lift; and who by a steady loss of character sinks actually to the baseness of plotting a

multiple murder, must doubtless be a very fair actor to go undetected in a community made by experience — if Ibsen's knowledge of his country be trustworthy — somewhat vigilant in regard to deception. In Bernick, Ibsen created the sharpest conceivable antithesis between the appearance and the essence of character. Things must have been decidedly rotten in that state, once part of Denmark, to have even remotely suggested the notion of a prominent merchant sending a leaky ship, well covered by insurance of course, out to sea, in the reasonable expectation of a disaster that would put out of the way the chief witness to his villainy. In this, Bernick's motive was originally pure greed. He salved his conscience by giving orders to repair the hulk, yet knew that it could not be put into seaworthy condition within the absurdly brief time allowed to the foreman of the shipyard; nor does he hesitate to corrupt the conscience of his subordinate in order to attain his nefarious purpose.<sup>h</sup>

Since in drama the measure of character is not only a baseness actually committed, but equally the resolution to commit it, Karsten Bernick is to all dramatical purposes a murderous rogue, even though the hand of fate shoots miraculously out of the machine to stay the consummation of his villainy and turn the impending collapse of all fortunes into an occasion for general rejoicing and thanksgiving. By this unlooked-for, and likewise uncalled-for, intervention of fate the questionable truth of the old saws that "honesty is ever the best policy" and "better late than never" was plainly brought home without too rude a shock to the delicate sensibilities of theatrical audiences. The poet had not yet reached the

stage of non-consideration for the feelings of the public which he first displayed in the last act of *A Doll's House*. The outcome of *Pillars of Society* is highly satisfactory to all parties concerned.<sup>6</sup>

It is the lie, we are told, that "has gone near to poisoning every fibre" in Bernick's character. Still, he is not incurable. The antidote is administered with vigor, a species of moral emetic that purges the system, and the patient emerges from the action with a clean bill of moral health such as he has never enjoyed since the days of his blessed babyhood. An American or English audience, in its childlike æsthetical unsophistication, will be the last to object that our hero, with a practiced eye for scenic effect, turns from sinner to saint with a swiftness that exceeds the usual speed limit of moral regeneration. Still less will they find fault with the *misc-en-scène* of his confession, which somehow suggests the spectacularity of Mr. Hall Caine's heroic reprobates spurred on by penitence to a high resolve and, in the colored language of their author, "delirious with a wild desire to face the consequences of their conduct."<sup>7</sup> To persons with some education in the drama the culmination of *Pillars of Society* will seem too theatrical to be dramatic. It is quite a different shudder that grips the soul when, in Tolstoy's peasant tragedy *The Power of Darkness*, the peasant Nikita, fighting his way to spiritual peace, lays bare his crime-stained conscience as he stutters out, without any premeditation, his deeds of infamy. There all the conditions are artistically combined to make the scene quite natural.

The principal fault of *Pillars of Society* is that some of its events do not depend upon anything the characters do,

but merely on an artificial conflux of circumstances. The satirical sting, turned against the acknowledged adorers of that abstract trinity, the Good, the Beautiful, and the True, sinks still deeper as the reflection is forced upon us that the tottering hero is propped and steadied, not by any of the model members of society, but by its declared "black sheep," a man and a woman outlawed by all constituted guardians of the conventions, he as a victim of unjust suspicions, and she apparently for no demonstrable sin in particular, probably just for being a headstrong, eccentric person, or, not to put too fine a point upon it, a frowzy old maid in short hair and a monstrously unbecoming "reform" dress. Did the poet in his temerity wish to demonstrate that of such metal consist perhaps the real anchors of our social safety? It would seem so, for, besides these two personalities of settled moral worth, Johan Tønnesen and Lona Hessel, who cannot thrive in the cabined air of a provincial town, only one other in the play, Dina Dorf, has the complete approval of the master; and she, too, the foundling child of a vagrant actress, is without the pale of strict social respectability. In an earlier version Dina runs off with Johan, — without benefit of clergy, — whereat Bernick makes this heterodox comment, "And yet I say, I place this marriage higher than many of ours at which all the formalities have been observed." <sup>1</sup>

As has already been mentioned, *Pillars of Society* gives an indication of Ibsen's later works, both as to the themes and the mood in which they are treated. Deliberately he proceeds to satirize his age through the leading types of

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, p. 70.

social and individual hypocrisy and personal and collective selfishness. It is only natural that among the mutual benefit contrivances of modern society matrimony should be subjected to the closest examination. After *Love's Comedy* and *The League of Youth* we are not unprepared for the depressing information that the most formidable stronghold of the all-pervading social lie is the domestic hearth. Hypocrisy begins at home. Mrs. Bernick is one of those angelically meek souls who are born to usefulness and forbearance and uninteresting rectitude; not being self-luminous, they shine only with light reflected from the nearest fixed luminary. In orthodox marriage this source of light is the personality of the husband. What if the light flicker and wane? The Bernick marriage, so typical of its kind, is anything but a perfect partnership; virtually, Betty is a negligible quantity for Bernick, and the critical moment brings her nothingness home to her through Bernick's unmistakable opinion of her worth: —

*Bernick.* And there is n't a soul here that I can confide in, or that can give me any support.

*Mrs. Bernick.* No one at all, Karsten?

*Bernick.* No; you know there is not.<sup>1</sup>

More drastically still is her nullity attested in the preliminary sketch. When Mrs. Bernick inquires about the proposed railway: "But, Karsten, what are the facts about that matter?" Bernick replies, "Ah, Betty dear, how can that be of any interest to *you*?"<sup>2</sup> Now, it is extremely unlikely that this particular woman, composed wholly of the certified milk of human kindness, would, even under greatly altered circumstances, have been much

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VI, p. 277.

<sup>2</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, p. 52.



more than an obedient organ of masculine authority; and yet the blame for Bernick's domestic solitude falls on his own shoulders. At least it is put there by the queer but breezy Lona Hessel, who explains, with power of attorney from the poet, why Betty has not been at all the woman whom Karsten Bernick required as a mate: because he has never shared his life-work with her; because he never placed her in a free and true relation with himself. This Lona Hessel, said to have been suggested by Miss Aasta Hansteen, a well-known artist and woman's rights advocate, is, dramatically considered, a hybrid between the "new woman" and the "emancipated woman" of nineteenth-century literature. At any rate, this character proves that Ibsen was already concerned with the woman question, and this interest reveals itself even more strongly in the original sketches than in the finished play. It is not as though his sympathies had not been from all beginning with the mind-strong and self-asserting type of womanhood, the sort that is meant by Margit (*The Feast at Solhaug*): "Aye, those women . . . they are not weak as we are; they do not fear to pass from thought to deed,"<sup>1</sup> or by Hjördis (*The Vikings*): "The strong women that did not drag out their lives tamely like thee and me."<sup>2</sup>

Betty Bernick, the stock pattern of defenseless and thoroughly domesticated femininity, is offset by the energetic, independent Lona Hessel, along with whom are placed two other women of different yet similarly vital character, Bernick's sister Martha and Dina Dorf. Martha is inwardly resigned and outwardly submissive, yet

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. II, p. 46.

resolute and full of capability; withal a tender, lovable, and loving woman. We meet with her kind in every following play; there is, for instance, Thea Elvsted in *Hedda Gabler*. In Dina Dorf the "new woman" comes into full life in modern literature: a girl who seems to have strayed from the old-time sane and safe pattern of womanhood, because she has an ear for the stirring call of a wider life; in love with the upright Tønnesen, she yet puts off her marriage to him till through the discipline of hard work she shall make something of herself and "be somebody."

*Pillars of Society*, while drenched with the "quintessence of Ibsenism," and in many ways typical of Ibsen's manner as well as his morals, is no longer acceptable to those dramatic standards to which the great playwright himself, by his superb rejection of custom and tradition, has educated us. Its value is curtailed by its acquiescence, whether willing or reluctant, in too many of the ruling dramatic devices. Ibsen, though struggling for artistic freedom, still seemed wedded to certain false idols of the stage, notably the haunting spectre of "poetic justice," that is, the distribution of rewards and punishments at the close of the action. Critical modern audiences will be apt to disclaim in the very name of Ibsen the elaborate climax, the spectacular *grande scène* with its tearful pathos, and above all other things the audacious improbabilities that bring about quite unexpectedly an all's-well-that-ends-well conclusion not in the course of nature, as it were, but by the fiat of an indulgent poet. We have grown more fastidious and exacting. As it is put by a critical writer in a different connection, "We no longer believe as of old in compensations or retribution, and in a

work of art we demand, not morals, but causes and effects, linked together in a relation as inevitable as in nature itself. Inevitable, not merited, is now the word." \* Its "preachiness" also detracts from the effect of the piece upon cultivated audiences of to-day. As yet Ibsen did not possess a dramatist's last secret — the power of conveying all his meaning through characters and events, instead of through set speeches of his own. *Pillars of Society* represents only a transitional type of play, a fact which unquestionably promoted its success. The theatricalities, after the manner of Scribe, Augier, Dumas fils, ingratiated this essentially revolutionary piece with the general public. The audiences never realized till too late that their preciously comfortable habits of thought had been ruthlessly upset.

In this country *Pillars of Society* was one of the first among Ibsen's plays to be opened up to the public's intellectual curiosity so solicitously bridled by the moral watchfulness of our Theatrical Trust. The recent enlargement of our allowance of modern thought cannot, however, be called illiberal for a public that clings so conservatively to some of the most barbaric views regarding the purposes of drama; for audiences accustomed to stroll to their seats after the rise of the curtain, addicted to "rag-time" between the acts, and tolerant towards the abomination of "soft music" meretriciously invoked for the sentimentalization of what with the playmongers passes under the name of "heart interest." The other plays of Ibsen, unless they are forced upon the heavy inertia of our public by foreign stars, cannot compete with *Pillars of Society*, simply because they depend for their

success too much upon collaboration from the audience. Without closest and most concentrated attention, the anterior plot, say of *Rosmersholm* or *John Gabriel Borkman*, so indispensable to the profounder comprehension of such plays, cannot possibly be caught. Ibsen created his works for educated and attentive lovers of the drama, capable of deriving enjoyment from its higher forms, and not for people whose disposition toward art is described in *Brand* in words that read as though they might have been specially intended for transoceanic exportation: —

A little poetry pleases me,  
And all our folks, in their degree;  
But — moderation everywhere!  
In *life* it never must have share, —  
Except at night, when folks have leisure,  
Between the hours of seven and ten,  
When baths of elevating pleasure  
May fit the mood of weary men.<sup>1</sup>

The unreadiness of the American public for the higher drama can easily be demonstrated in a variety of ways. The reluctant attitude towards Ibsen is only one of them, but one of the most characteristic. To illustrate it, in its contrast with the attitude of other countries, let us take, wholly at random, *The Master Builder*, esteemed, rightly or wrongly, to be one of Ibsen's three or four greatest works. It was published in December, 1892, and performed in German (at the Lessing-Theater, Berlin) in January, 1893. The following month, a performance in English was given (at the Trafalgar Square Theatre, London). Then followed, in order of chronology, the performances of the original, in March of the same year, both at

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III, p. 104.

Christiania and Copenhagen. Stockholm came immediately after. One year later, in April, 1894, *Solness le Constructeur* passed over the boards of the Théâtre L'Œuvre. Wide-awake America saw the *première* at a *private performance* in January, 1900 (Carnegie Lyceum). Yet, when all is said, one could wish we were only seven years behind Europe in those things that make for æsthetic education! Mr. William Archer puts the case very strongly, and in my opinion with fair accuracy, in saying: "A thoroughly well-mounted and well-acted revival [of *Pillars of Society*] might now appeal to that large class of playgoers which stands on very much the same intellectual level on which the German public stood in the eighteen-eighties. It exactly suited the German public of the eighties; it was exactly on a level with their theatrical intelligence. But it was above the intelligence of the Anglo-American public."<sup>1</sup> *Pillars of Society* was produced in 1877. In 1878 it was given by five different theatres in the city of Berlin within a single fortnight. The first American performance in English took place in New York, in 1891!<sup>1</sup>

While in point of pure artistic merit *Pillars of Society* is immeasurably inferior to *Ghosts* or *Hedda Gabler*, yet it intimates the artistic as well as the intellectual significance of Ibsen's future dramas. Already he excels in drastic seizure of the workaday life with its tragic message. Nor will a certain structural grandeur be denied to this play, while in the delineation of the figures the author proves himself a draftsman of superior power and surety. These outstanding merits are enhanced by the mastery

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VI, pp. xviii and xix.



now gained in wielding the dialogue. Ibsen's innovation in this art calls for some comment.

It will be remembered that Ibsen began literary life as a writer of verse. Of the older romantic plays, two are in verse, four in prose, and in the remaining two, prose and verse are intermingled. Of the sixteen "modern" plays, three are in verse, and thirteen in prose. His lyrics were few in number. In 1871 twenty-five were gathered into a slender volume, *Digte* ("Poems").<sup>m</sup> During the quarter-century that followed, only a few poems were added to that collection. Still, his verse dramas were instinct with the finest qualities of lyric poetry. But he did not long adhere to the conventional metrics. Already in *The Feast at Solhøg* and in *Olaf Liljekrans* he abandoned the regular dramatic metres for the freer rhythms of the ballad and the epic. After *Peer Gynt* he discarded versified dialogue altogether. His ambition was now to be a master of dramatic prose. And he made no idle boast when he declared that in changing from verse to prose he had embraced the far more difficult art of composing poetry in the plain, truthful language of reality.<sup>1</sup>

The most striking quality to be noted about Ibsen's dramatic dialogue is its artistic unconstraint; so extremely plain and natural is the language of the *dramatis personæ* that at first blush its simplicity might easily be mistaken for scantiness of vocabulary. But this economy must not be regarded as poverty. The wonder is that Ibsen can make his wholly unembellished speeches the adequate

<sup>1</sup> To the actress Lucie Wolf, by way of justifying his refusal to write a prologue for her use. *C*, p. 367; cf. also *C*, p. 269 (to Edmund Gosse), explaining his preference for prose in *Emperor and Galilean*.

vehicle, especially in his later works, of the subtlest thoughts and sublimest feelings; moreover his dialogue possesses to a rare degree the power of denoting and revealing human character.

While the nervous, incisive energy of the dialogue is undoubtedly due in considerable measure to the rugged force inherent in the medium, yet it also owes much to Ibsen's rediscovery of a patent linguistic fact. In nearly all languages, and particularly in German, there has arisen a wide difference between the everyday, or "colloquial," and the "literary" style of expression. Since for all the actual purposes of life we manage satisfactorily with "ordinary" language, the realistic drama of modern times has shown a strong tendency to reduce, if not entirely to abolish, that artificial difference. Of all literary forms, the social drama stood most in need of the change.

Ibsen, as we have seen, experimented for a long while before he succeeded, in *The League of Youth*, in replacing the exaltations of the conventional language of poetry with that unaffected, non-declamatory utterance which brings a play so much nearer to reality, and furthermore gives means and scope for distincter characterization. Through the powerful example of Ibsen, modern drama was able to rid itself of its hackneyed and stereotyped phraseology; the articulation of thought was henceforth accomplished without that continuous translation from the habitual manner of speaking into the so-called literary style. Ibsen established the important principle that the diction of a play must conform to the degree of its reality or ideality. In *Pillars of Society* the imitation of natural conversation may not be quite so successful as in *The*

*League of Youth*, because its employment in serious drama was encompassed with greater difficulties for the novice. But lest we undervalue his attainment by comparing it with the efforts of the "naturalists," we must bear in mind that Ibsen did not start from the same premises as they.

Ibsen skipped somehow the physiological stage of naturalism and started at the psychological stage, to which his contemporaries and successors were to find their way considerably later. He was a real Teuton in that the matter meant much more to him than the manner. Therefore his dialogue is not spiced with vulgarities; nor is it crammed with bad grammar and vacant jabber. Its progress is not irrelevant or saltatory, but always follows steadily the close path of succinct argumentation. In contradistinction to the prolixity of orthodox naturalism the dialogue in Ibsen's plays is restricted to the bare necessities. Hence the laconic brevity of the sentences, the strict avoidance of redundancies, the scanty use of adjectives,—no other writer has managed with so few. Unnecessary details are dispensed with on the principle that *veritatis simplex oratio est*. We are never bored by recitals spun out needlessly beyond their natural length. The intelligent follower of the psychological drama, be it remembered, is somewhat a psychologist himself. He does not care to have the playwright debar him from some auxiliary cerebral activity of his own. We accept a psychological demonstration much more willingly if it is not too explicit. We can take a hint; a gesture may have as much to say to us as a speech.

The dialogue of Ibsen is saved from triteness by its invariable relevancy; provided, of course, the acting be intel-

ligent enough to convey the full charge of suggestions contained in the lines: the more reticent a dramatic poet, the more does he depend on the complementary service of the impersonators, on their competent and discreet exercise of that rare combination of the expressive faculties which go to the making of the mimic art. By his rigid and novel demands Ibsen inaugurated a new school of acting. Its *summa regula* is the elimination of the spectatorial elements. The older technique of acting, where it is still practiced, is unequal to the task of performing his plays worthily; hence the comparative infrequency of Ibsen performances in such places. It is credibly asserted that Otto Brahm originated the true style of producing an Ibsen drama.

The utmost care was bestowed by Ibsen on the diction of his plays, in fact on every phase of their workmanship. This accounts for the fact that in spite of his industry and great powers of concentration he required on the average two years to make a drama. We are singularly fortunate in having been admitted to his workshop, as it were, through the publication of his "literary remains." Much valuable information about his working methods is stored up in these posthumous volumes." They consist for the greater part of the preliminary sketches and cast-off versions of most of the plays. Even mere shreds are preserved, since Ibsen was in the habit of jotting down a good line at once. The fundamental ideas of the dramas were also frequently fixed on paper in the form of striking observations. Each scene was practically completed before it was written down. In course of his long walks and during almost any time when his mind was unoccupied, for in-

stance, while he was dressing, the dialogue was being worked out, to the very phrasing. Once a play had taken form in his imagination, he constantly lived in the company of the figures. Not infrequently the minor characters were transposed from one play to another at this preparatory stage (e.g., the Wangel sisters from *Rosmersholm* to *The Lady from the Sea*, or Stockmann's, originally Bernick's, father-in-law, nicknamed the "Badger," from *Pillars of Society* to *An Enemy of the People*).<sup>1</sup> Even the names of the persons were much experimented with. Ibsen regarded them by no means as unimportant. In *Little Eyolf* the belief is set forth that names express the nature and character of a family.<sup>2</sup> Gregers Werle attributes a fatal quality to his name.<sup>3</sup> Lona Hessel (*Pillars of Society*) was at first called Abelona; in *Rosmersholm*, Brendel's original name was Hetman, that of Kroll, Gylling. Dr. Rank was at first named Hank, etc.<sup>4</sup>

The stage of creative work was preceded by very carefully drafted *scenarios*. At Christiania in 1895 a young man begged Ibsen to examine his play. "First show me your plan," quoth Ibsen. To the budding dramatist pleading that he had not written out a plan, having been guided "by inspiration," the old poet replied that a playwright who did not first construct a plan was ignorant of the A B C of his trade and incapable of writing for the stage. Occasionally, a piece would be dashed off at a single stroke, but perhaps *An Enemy of the People* is the only

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. XI, pp. 72 and 78.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. VIII, p. 267.

<sup>4</sup> For these and many other examples consult the sketches in vol. III of the *SW*<sup>II</sup>.



well-authenticated instance of that. As a rule, each play was re-written several times. To the last, Ibsen would seek to improve the composition by means of abridgment, transpositions, verbal changes, etc.

During earlier years he attended the rehearsals of his plays whenever it was possible for him to do so. He was helpful, appreciative, and kind to the actors, but gradually interested himself less and less in the stage production, and in later days took no part whatever in this final phase of dramatic work. His loss of interest may have been due principally to the discrepancy a performance must invariably have brought out between the figures as they existed in his vivid imagination and their impersonation by the actors. To externalize all the singularities with which Ibsen has outfitted his characters is indeed a task difficult enough to defy the art of the actor; it is incomparably easier for a player to vitalize a "normal" person deporting himself by rule and line than a "crank" with all his tricks of habit. Moreover, Ibsen intentionally denied to some of his figures an absolute definiteness and consistency.

After *Pillars of Society* Ibsen's international position was made. His audience was swelled to enormous proportions over that of the average Scandinavian author whose whole country offers a potential audience smaller in numbers than the population of New York City. His work was recognized as epochal by leading critics,<sup>9</sup> and henceforth he was sure of intelligent attention for the ideas expounded in his dramas. In *Pillars of Society* the range of these ideas was indicated, and so was Ibsen's critical attitude and temper. And yet this play is of far

less ethical consequence than those that follow. After all, the moral disorders in *Pillars of Society* arise, on a closer inspection, simply out of the turpitude of a particular man or at most a set of people, — they are not necessarily an outgrowth of the organic corruption of society. Otherwise stated, *Pillars of Society* strikes at what might be but a solitary instance puffed up and generalized.

It is in *A Doll's House* and in *Ghosts* that our wrongs are for the first time presented as structural rather than incidental in our society. Instead of the exception, the rule is now impeached.<sup>p</sup> The tragical strain in these plays consists in a struggle of the spirit of subjective liberty against the objective limitations established by the body politic. A readjustment of even the most unquestioningly accepted social arrangements looms up as an extremely likely demand.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE WOMAN QUESTION — A DOLL'S HOUSE

THE foundations of the social structure rest, according to Ibsen's unshakable conviction, on the mutual relations of the sexes. This explains why among his themes, although the erotic passion plays such a small part, yet the sex question occupies a dominant rôle. And the sex question is nor more nor less than the woman question. Therefore the woman question, in its social, economic, and above all its spiritual bearings, springs into extraordinary prominence in Ibsen's works. It is perhaps the one subject on which the notorious mental interrogation mark with which he loves to conclude his plays straightens itself frankly into an emphatic exclamation point.

Personally, a writer could not well be farther from feminism than Ibsen was. A temperamental predilection for the *féminine* point of view is assuredly not one of his natural idiosyncrasies, and yet he became the most pronounced woman emancipator of the age. His indorsement of feminine claims is simply an act of unswerving allegiance to the force of logic. In many of his dramas a woman is the principal figure: Fru Inger, Helen Alving, Nora Helmer, etc., and in all his works such a prominent position is assigned to women that he has been universally applauded by the women's rights advocates. Yet when the Women's Rights League of Norway, at a general convention in 1898, extolled the poet's merits as a cham-

pion of their cause, he made the following characteristic reply:—

I am not a member of the Women's Rights League. Whatever I have written has been without any conscious thought of making propaganda. I have been more poet and less social philosopher than people generally seem inclined to believe. My work has been the description of humanity. The task always before my mind has been to advance our country and give the people a higher standard. To obtain this, two factors are of importance. It is for the mothers by strenuous and sustained effort to awaken a conscious feeling of *culture* and *discipline*. This feeling must be created before it will be possible to lift the people to a higher plane. It is the women who are to solve the social problem. As mothers they are to do it. And only as such can they do it. Here lies a great task for woman. My thanks; and success to the Women's Rights League! <sup>1</sup>

It deserves passing notice, that in the "Scandinavian Union" at Rome Ibsen was active in procuring the ballot for women members. On February 27, 1879, he made a forceful argument before the general meeting.<sup>2</sup>

It is impossible to survey the gallery of female effigies painted by Ibsen, from the Vestal Furia in *Catilina*, the virago Hjördis in *The Vikings*, past the more firmly outlined modern portraits: Selma Bratsberg, Lona Hessel, Nora Helmer, Rebecca West, Hedda Gabler, and so on, to the symbolically drawn Ellida Wangel, Hilda Wangel and the almost pre-raphaelitic Irene in the *Epilogue*, without realizing that he was indeed profoundly concerned in the Woman Question. It had interested him absorbingly since 1870. Throughout his career he dreamed of the reorganization of society through woman.

<sup>1</sup> *SNL*, p. 65 f.

<sup>2</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I. pp. 211-23, and *ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 291.

Addressing the workingmen of Trondhjem, June 14, 1885, he said: —

The reshaping of social conditions, which is now under way out there in Europe, is chiefly concerned with the future position of the workingman and of woman. This transformation it is that I am awaiting, and for it I will and shall work with all my power as long as I live.<sup>1</sup>

(It is perhaps curious that Ibsen, who in his early manhood was inflamed by the labor movement, failed to let at least one of his plots centre about this interest, as have some of his contemporaries. The reason may have lain in his conviction that any reform in the outer organization of society is a mere makeshift. He preferred to deal with the fundamental trouble and its radical cure.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless he has long been regarded by workingmen as a forceful ally in their struggle for economic and social betterment.)

Men, including the so-called "liberals," are still open to Lona Hessel's charge that they live — with their interests and ambitions, that is — in a bachelor world, "and that they have no eyes for womankind."<sup>3</sup> "Modern society is no human society; it is merely a masculine society."<sup>4</sup> "A woman cannot be herself in modern society," says Ibsen, "which is a society exclusively masculine, having laws written by men and judges who pronounce upon women's conduct from the masculine point of view."<sup>5</sup> In a sketch for *A Doll's House*, Nora says: "The Law is unjust, Christine; one can notice clearly that it is

<sup>1</sup> *SNL*, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> *C*, p. 425, he explains that he never had anything to do with the labor movement as such. Cf. a brief article on his relations to social democracy, *SW*, vol. I, p. 510; also, *C*, p. 415 and pp. 430-31.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. VI, p. 408. <sup>4</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, p. 206. <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 77.



made by men.”<sup>1</sup> The thousands and thousands of women who have applauded Mr. Theodore Roosevelt's diatribes on the prime function of their sex have totally failed to grasp the corollary of his argument, namely, that, as some one has put it, in modern society a woman ought to die, like certain insects, as soon as she has done her part toward propagating the species. Else would they not in a spirit of revolt ask with one of our newest poets, —

Mothering, mothering, mothering,  
Cannot we find our lives except that way? <sup>a</sup>

The tremendous excitement aroused by *A Doll's House* (“Et Dukkehjem,” 1879)<sup>2</sup> was due to a habitual confusion. The criticism of marriage in the concrete was taken as equivalent to an attack upon the institution of marriage and a plea for its abrogation; no wonder men's minds were staggered. Was it not rather true that, as an ardent believer in the sacredness of marriage, Henrik Ibsen viewed with a sense of alarm the prevailing misconception of its meaning? He believed in the possibility of noble union between husband and wife, because he believed in woman. The congenital ambition of a true and normal woman is to kindle her life with the higher flame of self-renunciation and to give of herself to such as have need of her. It is touching to see how among Ibsen's women those that have been cheated out of the joys and sorrows of physical motherhood bestow motherly care upon some grown-up child. As instance, Lona Hessel cheerfully slaving for Johan, or Ella Rentheim (*When*

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> The earliest draft is contained in *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, pp. 75–173. It was previously published in German in *Die neue Rundschau*, December, 1906.

*We Dead Awaken*) planning for Erhart, or Thea Elvsted (*Hedda Gabler*), perhaps the most self-sacrificing of them, raising up the sunken Eilert Lövborg at the expense of her peace and good name. Significantly all the men in Ibsen's plays who amount to anything require, in order to realize themselves, the helpful comradeship of a woman. No merely comely and gracious women are found among his heroines. In *The Vikings*, Sigurd pronounces *ex voce poetæ* Ibsen's ideal of womanhood and wifehood: —

The warrior needs a high-souled wife. She whom I choose must not rest content with a humble lot; no honor must seem too high for her to strive for; gladly must she follow me a-viking; war-weed must she wear; she must egg me on to the strife, and never blink her eyes where sword-blades lighten; for if she be fainthearted, scant honor will befall me.<sup>1</sup>

Thea Elvsted, Hilda Wangel, Rebecca West, like many other women characters in Ibsen's plays, are the guides and inspiritors of the men they love. Ella and Irene lead their lovers upwards — toward the top of symbolical peaks.

And yet the average masculine notion of a happy marriage and a perfect wife, at the time when *A Doll's House* was written, sadly discountenanced the requirement of spiritual companionship.<sup>b</sup> Petty domestic tyranny was still in full blast. The Nora of the first part of the play, still more the Nora of the anterior plot, fairly represents the unspecified type of femininity then in demand for the purpose of marriage. Women themselves hardly ever called in question the sanctity, let alone the moral legality, of marriage between persons spiritually unrelated. They

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II, p. 79.

were not a little startled to see the marriage problem elevated to the foremost theme of dramaturgy by Ibsen, and to hear it reiterated, from *A Doll's House* to the *Epilogue*, that marriage can only be happy when it rests on the basis of common ideals; that only when a man and a woman have the will and strength to give and to take with equal measure may they merge their lives and be entitled to equip a new generation with the gift of life. In an age of enlightenment true wedlock should differentiate itself from illicit or ephemeral union of the sexes, in that the husband looks upon the wife as his peer and partner, entitled to share his anxieties and troubles as well as his successes.

While in *A Doll's House* this thought is greatly emphasized and elaborated, it had been given expression in an earlier work. In effect it is from all beginning one of Ibsen's ethical *Leitmotifs*. In *The League of Youth*, Selma Bratsberg complains in the fourth act that she has been kept like a doll; and bursts forth into this strain of rebuke against the rich and prominent family of her husband:—

*Selma.* Oh, how cruel you have been to me! Shamefully — all of you! It was my part always to accept — never to give. I have been like a pauper among you. You never came and demanded a sacrifice of me; I was not fit to bear anything. I hate you! I loathe you!

*Erik.* What can this mean?

*The Chamberlain.* She is ill; she is out of her mind.

*Selma.* How I have thirsted for a single drop of your troubles, your anxieties! But when I begged for it you only laughed me off. You have dressed me up like a doll; you have played with me as you would play with a child. Oh, what a joy it would have been to me to take my share in your burdens! How I longed,

how I yearned, for a large, and high, and strenuous part in life! Now you come to me, Erik, now that you have nothing else left. But I will not be treated simply as a last resource. I will have nothing to do with your troubles now, I won't stay with you! I will rather play and sing in the streets! Let me be! Let me be! <sup>1</sup>

In this case, the husband's offer of companionship, his demand that they bear the blow together, comes too much *ex abrupto*. Selma feels herself unfit for her rightful place after so many years of coddling and pampering.

Unquestionably that speech of Selma's contains the germ of *A Doll's House*, yet Selma's predicament was already prefigured by that of Anitra in *Peer Gynt*. The relation of Nora to Helmer, with its analogies in many later works, may thus be traced back at least as far as *The League of Youth*. In 1869 George Brandes remarked that the figure of Selma required more room and separate treatment; ten years after that *A Doll's House* made its appearance. Being aware of the serial continuity of Ibsen's dramas, we can easily imagine him pondering the fates in store for a Selma Bratsberg or Dina Dorf under circumstances of a definitely different sort. Imagine a young and yearning creature, fairly willful and of stormy temper, grown up without the discipline of work and responsibilities, without as much as a single confrontation with any of the serious sides of life, and having basked perpetually in the fulsome adoration of parents and other admirers, — imagine her all of a sudden married. Married moreover to a man of sterling but chilly uprightness, whose heart is a walled fortress of the proprieties, whose ambition knows no goal beyond that of being a "mainstay of society," and

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VI, p. 130.

whose highest satisfaction consists in the good opinion of the neighbors. How would such a woman bear herself in the crisis? Will her spirit emerge unshaken from the supreme battle for her liberty, against a form of oppression all the more dangerous for its remoteness from any outer baseness and brutality? For in *A Doll's House* we have to do with a type of egoist far more insidious in his virtuous serenity than was the criminally minded Consul Bernick. When Nora has disclosed her unalterable decision to part from her husband, she makes a memorable retort to his desperate plea.

*Helmer.* This is monstrous! Can you forsake your holiest duties in this way?

*Nora.* What do you consider my holiest duties?

*Helmer.* Do I need to tell you that? Your duties to your husband and your children.

*Nora.* I have other duties equally sacred.

*Helmer.* Before all else you are a wife and a mother.

*Nora.* That I no longer believe. I believe that before all else I am a human being, just as much as you are — or at least that I should try to become one.<sup>1</sup>

How does Ibsen arrive at such a startling formulation of a world-old problem? In the posthumous writings the short notice on *A Doll's House* shows precisely how for him a problem springs into actuality. In the first sentence a poetic theme is stated, so to speak, *sub specie æterni*; Ibsen speaks of the eternal tragical antagonism between the masculine and feminine modes of life and thought. In the second paragraph the problem is narrowed down to the domestic sphere, and in the third the woman question as it is to-day is touched.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VII, pp. 147-48.

<sup>2</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, p. 77.



By wresting speeches like the above from the context it was a simple matter for prudery, whether attired in petticoats or in trousers, to distort and misstate Ibsen's main argument. Nora's declaration of independence, when unintelligently garbled out of every logical coherence, cannot but go counter to the religious interpretation of woman's duty, likewise to the well-nigh universal sentiment of husbands. A great hullabaloo was raised about the poet's ears by the Amalgamated Defenders of the Hearth and Home. Even in Germany, where already in 1880 the play had immense vogue, the theatre-going public would not put up with the "revolting" conclusion. The bewilderment of audiences had to be allayed by the attenuation and dispersion of the tragic theme. Ibsen himself finally preferred to furnish a happy ending rather than leave the makeshift to the clumsy hands of hired mechanics.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately the necessity of yielding to the childish demand soon passed away. *A Doll's House*, therefore, must not be counted with *Great Expectations*, *Der Grüne Heinrich*, *The Light that Failed*, and the other double-enders of nineteenth-century literature, because its author definitely repudiated the reversible ending at the earliest opportunity.

The charge that Ibsen wrote *A Doll's House* as an attempt not to reform but to break up the institution of marriage is too utterly ridiculous for refutation. And the virtuous disgust with the course of the action, in particular with Nora for wantonly breaking the holiest of home ties to gratify a sublimated species of selfishness, strongly recalls the impression produced by *Antony and Cleopatra*

<sup>1</sup> *C*, pp. 325-27 and 436-37.

on a British matron, who regretfully referred to the conduct of Shakespeare's heroine as "so different from the home life of our own dear Queen." It goes without saying that Ibsen believed in the institution. But he was not primarily interested in institutions, but in human beings. Without any conscious design, as we have seen, he was drawn into the woman movement. To him more than to any other individual factor the gradual crystallizing of public opinion on its issues is due. In the seventies of the past century he was already in advance of the position so faintheartedly taken now by the average ladylike male champion of woman's rights. Instead of dallying with the old debating-club questions, Shall woman study? — vote? — practice a profession? — Ibsen hoists into the light the main consideration, Shall woman truly live?° To live, in Ibsen's sense, is to be an individual. And individuality requires freedom. His natural dislike for womankind is at once overwhelmed by his entire moral and mental clarity.

Most men, of course, would deny that women are unfree or unhappy in their lot. In the words of Mr. Bernard Shaw, they have come to think that the nursery and the kitchen are the natural sphere of a woman, exactly as English children come to think that a cage is the natural sphere of a parrot. But if men are sincere in their desire that love of the higher personal liberty be wrought into the fibre of the nation, so that, in Walt Whitman's phrase, the world may be peopled by "a larger, saner brood"; if they have faith in the recipe, "Produce great persons, the rest follows," — then how, in the name of common sense, can they perpetuate their squatter's claim to the exclusive

right of personality? Ibsen believes with John Stuart Mill in extending that right to women. But if, then, you grant to woman the status of personality, you must not restrain her from its exercise. Ibsen's working thesis, so to speak, is this: a person's responsibility to herself should prevail over other responsibilities with which it may come into collision. Evidently, then, the woman question is closely bound up with the marriage question, and in fact Ibsen's dramas deal with the conjugal fates of women, not with their virginal romances.

According to Ibsen's social code, matrimony should not be the end of freedom. That is no true family where the husband counts for everything and the wife for nothing. Children reared in such a home are very apt to develop into tyrants if boys, and, if girls, into drudges or — dolls. And that such, indeed, is the preponderant state of domestic life in continental Europe is the common opinion among us. English novelists of the last two or three generations have given us warrant to think similarly about English life. That fascinating blackguard, Count Fosco, in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, lauds English women for their especial submissiveness: —

What is the secret of Madame Fosco's unhesitating devotion of herself to the fulfillment of my boldest wishes, to the furtherance of my deepest plans? . . . I remember that I am writing in England; I remember that I was married in England — and I ask, if a woman's marriage obligations in this country provide for her private opinion of her husband's principles? No! They charge her unreservedly to love, honor, and obey him. That is exactly what my wife has done, . . . and I loftily assert her accurate performance of her conjugal duties. Silence, Calumny! Your sympathy, wives of England, for Madame Fosco.<sup>4</sup>

But when we have taken a complacent look at the mote in our transoceanic neighbors' eyes, let us feel transiently for the homegrown beam and ask ourselves whether our American family life is better ordered for the moral advantage of society under conditions which enslave the fathers in soulless money-getting and the mothers in systematized triflings, leaving the exercise of liberty, in good truth more than a plenty of it, to the monopoly of their children.

To particularize a bit, with reference to the play under discussion. So far as the social condition of the American woman is concerned, more especially in the upper strata of society, suspicion occurs that much of the superficial charm of our women is just a bit like the flat frivolity of the dancing, rollicking, sweet-toothed Nora, and that, on the other hand, the vaunted chivalry of the American man may also be not without a disagreeable resemblance to the behavior and mental habits of Torvald Helmer. If the premises were changed to suit the case, how would the average American family measure up to the test applied in *A Doll's House*? Since Ibsen's play has remained to this time the most impressive literary document instigated by the woman question, one must not shrink, in attempting an answer, from entering somewhat upon the dangerous premises of that burning question.

America is the acknowledged home of woman-worship; thick-skinned cynics say, of woman fetishism. Nowhere on earth are women treated with so much real regard as in these United States; chivalrous consideration for them is observed at every grade of the increasingly composite order of our society; it is the chief, not to say the only,

contribution of America to the higher culture of the age. Viewed externally, the opportunities of women in this country equal those of the men. Their legal status is devised to accord a satisfactory degree of protection. They are freely allowed to pursue their education. For the wage-earning woman, and for the spinster in any social condition whatsoever, America is, by comparison with most if not all other countries, a veritable paradise: and if the assumption were fair that the ultimate goal of feminine ambition is well placed this side of the essentials of a true humanity, in other words, if it could be held unscanned that her imagination limits woman to lower ideals than a man's, then indeed any demand for still further extension of her rights might in this imperfect world be classed among the purely visionary desiderata.

But when, from admitting that our type of civilization is more generally philogynous than are all other types, we proceed to the embarrassing query whether women in America are allotted a more influential share than elsewhere in the common life, the answer cannot as yet but be negative. The national sentiment, despite all appearances to the contrary, is still distinctly unfriendly to higher feminine aspirations, and refuses stubbornly to apportion between the sexes the responsibility for the nation's important concerns. It is asserted that women are freely admitted to the practice of the professions; yet the assertion is set awry by the fact that the deep-rooted prejudice against women practitioners, notably in the law, still renders them, after these many years of theoretical admission, rather sporadic phenomena. Even rarer are the instances of women occupying the pulpit — out-



side, that is, of the patented feministic cult that passes by the name of "Christian Science." But what of women teachers? True, they are numerous as the sands of the sea, yet even in the co-educational colleges they are seldom installed in professorial chairs; nay, the very strongholds of the woman cause in education, the women's colleges, prefer as a rule, wherever they are not debarred by briefs and charters, to appoint men to the more prominent positions. It seems we are not dangerously advanced on the path of "emancipation," as the movement used to be called in the earlier days. When we come to the surest criterion of the national attitude, do we not find masculine opinion, in the main, still stoutly opposed to the political demands of the "suffragette"? There is, of course, another side to all this. Such apparent solidarity of masculine opinion were hardly possible had woman not shown herself wanting somewhat in the qualities most prized in an andromorphously structured world, and had she not failed to bring her abilities to bear strongly on the national life, in despite of all obstructions. In no province of the public life, however, has there appeared in this country an unmistakably great personality among women, a genius of compelling power in art, science, letters, or in any other division of human service. But after all, it is not an easy thing to distinguish clearly between cause and effect in the given state of affairs. For who will undertake to specify to what extent feminine mediocrity might be the mere consequence of that disparaging attitude of the party in power, and the result of inferior standards bred by enforced imparity?

At all events, the woman cult of the American man is

limited and qualified. His sheltering gallantry is capable of nearly every sacrifice, but stops absolutely short of the concession of equality. The American regards himself willingly and proudly as the ordained protector of woman, and regards woman as a precious and in many respects superior being, delightful as a companion of his leisure, but unfortunately incompetent, by decree of nature, to participate in his own supreme interest in life, namely, the stern, single-minded pursuit of business. It is really not such a fearfully far cry from the average relation of the sexes in wedlock to the domestic order pictured in *A Doll's House*, against which Americans more than any other people protest so loudly.

A quite pessimistic view of the American woman's condition is taken, in the London *Times*, by a visitor to this country, who observes: —

In America, before marriage, the man and the girl are excellent friends and comrades, enjoying much freedom in their intercourse. After marriage the two seem to lead separate lives. The man is wholly wrapt up in his business, and the woman, when her work in the house is over, devotes most of her energies to the pursuit of social pleasures. In fact, they cannot really be said to lead a common life. . . . When all is said and done, the American woman, with all her independence, is the most dependent of women. . . . It is more than probable that the large number of divorces in America are due to the unconscious desire on the part of the woman to find a real partner and comrade in life instead of the mere financial agent that the average American man is contented to be.<sup>e</sup>

The acquiescence of the average woman of the upper classes in her exclusion from her husband's intellectual interests, her felicity in material comforts, and her child-

ish enjoyment of the banalities that crowd her days, indicate, so it would seem, a spiritual kinship with the pampered, frivolous, and, so far as she knows, completely happy mistress of the Doll's House. Will she also, sooner or later, rise in revolt and strike out for freedom — freedom at whatever cost?

For note that Nora Helmer in Ibsen's drama, the "squirrel," the "butterfly," who has never had any opinions of her own, determines of a sudden to think and act for herself:—

Henceforth I can't be satisfied with what most people say, and what is in books. I must think things out for myself, and try to get clear about them.<sup>1</sup>

Her tragic awakening to her actual position is precipitated by her discovery of her husband's inability to identify himself with her romantic conception of his character. Recollect that she had committed a punishable act, though in ignorance of the law, in order to save the life of her husband who had to be taken away to rebuild his shattered health. He being without means, it was a case of borrow or die, but Nora realized that Helmer would rather face death than debt, so the money, obtained from a lender, must appear as a gift from Nora's father, then lying at death's door. The lender insists on the father's indorsement, for better security. The sick man, however, must not be worried with such a transaction, so Nora

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VII, p. 148. Similarly, Rita in *Little Eyolf* is animated by a will to raise herself to a higher function of existence. When told by Alfred that she is unfit to improve the natures of proletarian children, she placidly replies: "Then I shall have to educate myself to it, perfect myself, practice." Vol. XI, p. 146.

lightheartedly attaches his signature to the paper, as a matter of course. After that all things go exceedingly well with the Helmers till Nora of a sudden is threatened with exposure. Krogstad, the holder of the forged note, has been discharged from his modest position in the bank of which Helmer has just been appointed director, and he uses his power over Nora to extort her intercession with her husband. Nora, to whom her deed now appears in the light of its possible consequences, is in despair, because she never doubts for a moment what Helmer will do when the secret comes out: to save her honor, he will speak a heroic lie, shoulder the guilt himself, and thus wreck his brilliant career. Too little is apt to be made of this very important point by actresses and audiences. It suffices by itself to explain Nora's sudden revulsion of feeling when under the even polish of his virtues this pattern of masculine righteousness comes forth in his rank egoism. After the truth is revealed, and Nora is about to leave Helmer, he demands to know: —

And can you also make clear to me how I have forfeited your love?

*Nora.* Yes, I can. It was this evening, when the miracle did not happen; for then I saw you were not the man I had imagined.<sup>1</sup>

Helmer's chief concern, on learning the distressing truth, is with the danger of his situation. The fear of social and even legal penalty makes him behave as a coward; he is ready to hush the matter up on the blackmailer's own conditions. To the motives of Nora's act her idolized champion is utterly blind and requites that proof of self-

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VII, p. 150.

effacing love with resentful condemnation. Thus her affection suddenly loses its object; Helmer becomes like a stranger to her. Nora is right in feeling that it would require the miracle of miracles to change both their natures so that after this their living together should be a marriage. Helmer's shallow-souled hope at the last moment, that this miracle of miracles will happen, is vain. Nora must leave her husband, — as Selma in *The League of Youth* would leave hers, because living nominally as wife with a man who is either too far above or too far below her in character and intellect is, for a self-respecting woman, suggestive of moral and physical bondage.<sup>f</sup>

The tragedy of the disillusioned woman was not written by Ibsen for the first time. If *Macbeth* is understood as the tragedy of thwarted ambition, the ambition is that of a woman capable of any deed for the aggrandizement of the man she loves, a woman to whom tragical retribution comes through the discrepancy between her hero's actual worth and his mirrored image in her soul. Way back in antiquity, Euripides had treated the motive in his *Medea* even more convincingly; in this tragedy the contrast between the two principals, as their characters develop and disintegrate in ways quite opposite, is made psychologically clearer. Of the many who followed Euripides, Franz Grillparzer was most nearly equal to the grandeur of the theme. For in his trilogy, *Das goldene Vlies*, the monstrous deed of the Kolchian princess is explained for the first time as one humanly possible, and, speaking from the ground of æsthetics, rational and inevitable. With unexcelled skill the deepest seat of its motives is bared to our comprehension, so that in this



respect the plot may be said to have been fully modernized. Yet it was reserved for Henrik Ibsen finally to shift that tragedy into the everyday sphere where disillusion in love and marriage is a by no means uncommon experience.

Dogmatic criticism has branded *A Doll's House* as a challenge hurled from the open gates of anarchism. The character of Nora herself has been condemned by facile "idealists," on two principal counts: in the first place, she is untrue and dishonest in things little and great; secondly, she is without the most primitive of virtues, found even among savages and brutes, for she forsakes her children as well as her husband, therefore she can have no true maternal instinct. Were Nora in reality the heartless, soulless wretch pictured by Ibsen's adversaries, it might be enough to point out once more that a poet and his plays, even in darker ages than this, have not been censured and suppressed because of the moral unworthiness of the *dramatis personæ*. Or must we revise the characters of Othello, Shylock, Richard III, Phèdre, Franz Moor, *e tutti quanti* up to the "ideal demands" of the cheerful optimist? The themes of great dramas are not moral theories and beliefs, but men and women, whether good or evil. As a matter of fact, however, Nora is not a bad woman at all, save in the eyes of purblind inquisitors. So far as her forgery is concerned, Nora's act is no more criminal by intent than is the act for which Victor Hugo's Jean Valjean goes first to prison. But even if, clearly against the judgment of the poet, she should be adjudged guilty of forgery, how on earth can the other charge be sustained? Nora's case cannot be argued more effectually

than by Mr. Bernard Shaw, from whose *Quintessence of Ibsenism* the following keen analysis is quoted: —

It is her husband's own contemptuous denunciation of a forgery, formerly committed by the money-lender himself, that destroys her self-satisfaction and opens her eyes to her ignorance of the serious business of the world to which her husband belongs — the world outside the home he shares with her. When he goes on to tell her that commercial dishonesty is generally to be traced to the influence of bad mothers, she begins to perceive that the happy way in which she plays with the children, and the care she takes to dress them nicely, are not sufficient to constitute her a fit person to train them. In order to redeem the forged bill, she resolves to borrow the balance due upon it from a friend of the family. She has learnt to coax her husband into giving her what she asks by appealing to his affection for her: that is, by playing all sorts of pretty tricks until he is wheedled into an amorous humor. This plan she has adopted without thinking about it, instinctively taking the line of least resistance with him. And now she naturally takes the same line with her husband's friend. An unexpected declaration of love from him is the result; and it at once explains to her the real nature of the domestic influence she has been so proud of. All her illusions about herself are now shattered; she sees herself as an ignorant and silly woman, a dangerous mother, and a wife kept for her husband's pleasure merely; but she only clings the harder to her delusion about him: he is still the ideal husband who would make any sacrifice to rescue her from ruin. She resolves to kill herself rather than allow him to destroy his own career by taking the forgery on himself to save her reputation. The final disillusion comes when he, instead of at once proposing to pursue this ideal line of conduct when he hears of the forgery, naturally enough flies into a vulgar rage and heaps invectives on her for disgracing him. Then she sees that their whole family life has been a fiction — their home a mere doll's house in which they have been playing at ideal husband and father, wife and mother.

So she leaves him then and there, in order to find out the reality of things for herself, and to gain some position not fundamentally false, refusing to see her children again until she is fit to be in charge of them, or to live with him until she and he become capable of a more honorable relation to one another than that in which they have hitherto stood. He at first cannot understand what has happened, and flourishes the shattered ideals over her as if they were as potent as ever. He presents the course most agreeable to him — that of her staying at home and avoiding a scandal — as her duty to her husband, to her children, and to her religion; but the magic of these disguises is gone, and at last even he understands what has really happened, and sits down alone to wonder whether that more honorable relation can ever come to pass between them.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile the separation in this typical case, prompted though it is by egocentric motives, is exacted no less, in the opinion of Ibsen, by the interest of society at large. The poet was not deceived in regard to what would actually have happened in real life. Nora's love of her children, her unintellectualized mother instinct, would surely have risen superior to all selfish reasons; she would have remained. But, thus we hear the poet questioning himself, — could the continuance of those false relations between wife and husband have conduced to the moral benefit of the children? Suppose the dread of *éclat* — divorce was still abhorrent in the eyes of respectable folk — caused that ill-assorted pair to continue living together, or even if they were moved to do so by consideration for their children, might not the result be expected to give the lie flatly to the pretty sentiment that home ties should under no circumstances ever be broken? Ibsen divined a causal nexus against which Philistia had shut its mind. "These women of to-day — maltreated as daughters, sis-

ters, and wives, denied all education suited to their aptitudes, held aloof from their vocation, cheated out of their heritage, and embittered at heart—become mothers of the rising generation. What will be the consequence?"<sup>1</sup> Suppose the avoidance of a matrimonial rupture should involve the ruin of the family, — the moral and, under conceivable circumstances, even physical blight of the progeny, — what a fearful price to pay for the good opinion of unthinking, prejudiced defenders of the stock virtues! By a series of hypothetical questions such as the foregoing the works of Ibsen are severally instigated and linked together. The reply to the query this time is the most harrowing tragedy of modern times, *Ghosts*.<sup>h</sup>

A word is still due the technical qualities of *A Doll's House*. In *Ghosts* Ibsen, after having long wavered in his adherence to "the well-made" play, reached a point past the parting of the ways. Into the new, even to him unfamiliar, road he had struck out in the latter part of *A Doll's House*, with the result that this drama contains a mixture of two quite heterogeneous styles of dramatic presentment. The earlier part of the play is still strongly marked by the then prevailing French craftsmanship, with its sudden arrivals of the unexpected and notorious overproduction of drastic antitheses. At the instant when Nora exclaims, and that with repetitional emphasis, "Oh, what a wonderful thing it is to live and to be happy," Krogstad's ominous ring sounds at the hall door; more sinister still is his appearance, in the same act, as Nora is romping with her children. Perhaps the clearest evidence that more attention has been paid to the machinery than

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, pp. 177-78.

to the motive power is presented by the Christmas holiday trip suddenly taken by Krogstad for no other apparent purpose than that of expediting the progress of the plot. The same fault may be further instanced by the improbability of Nora's relations with Mrs. Linden, who drops quite suddenly and unaccountably into her position of bosom friend and confidante. Subsequently, Ibsen avoided more carefully the use of mere thickening ingredients for the plot. *A Doll's House* contains, besides, several pieces of out-and-out theatricality; especially must the conclusion of Act II be adjudged a rank piece of staginess by playgoers who are at all fastidious. With all due allowance for the dramatist's manifest privilege of working his scenes up to a climax, the well-known *Tarantella* incident is a *coup de théâtre* of the flimsiest description, clearly borrowed from the department of melodrama. It is almost as though the playwright had purposely chosen a supreme exhibition of gaudery for his farewell performance in that line of work, so as to justify himself all the better for renouncing the old ways. For to the final act of *A Doll's House* we must indeed assign, with Mr. Archer, a pivotal importance for the technique not alone of Ibsen's dramaturgy in its perfection, but of modern drama in general. Of course the change in Nora may be deemed too sudden; the poet's intellectual intent has broken through the restraints of the proper dramatic formalities. Once the transition be granted, however, we are rejoiced to see Ibsen shedding forever the hackneyed outer devices, casting his fate solely with the inner truth of the argument, and launching a new dramatic art on its victorious course. In the great explanation between hus-



band and wife, in the latter part of this act, in which Nora claims and gains her personal freedom, the poet himself achieves freedom, namely, the liberation of his art from the trammels of dead theatrical traditions. And what more gratifying testimony could there be adduced for our own artistic advance than the conversion of the public's taste from the sensationalism of the earlier acts to the sober impressiveness of the final scene? The great Danish actress, Mrs. Hennings, who created the part of Nora as well as a number of other leading rôles in Ibsen's plays, spoke, in an interview shortly after the poet's death, of the delight she had formerly taken in embodying the part of Nora through the first two acts. The impersonation of the "lark," the "squirrel," the irresponsible "butterfly," had then thrilled her audiences, as well as herself. "When I now play the part," she went on, "the first acts leave me indifferent. Not until the third act do I become really interested; after that, intensely so." <sup>1</sup>

To *A Doll's House* Ibsen owes his celebrity in England and America, just as *Pillars of Society* gave him a definite standing in Germany. The part of Nora has proved exceptionally attractive to nearly all our tragédiennes of the last twenty years.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VII, p. xvi. <sup>7</sup>

## CHAPTER IX

### GHOSTS

*GHOSTS* ("Gengangere," 1881)<sup>a</sup> is the sternest of Ibsen's arraignments of our social laws and customs, and possibly the justest, since it is inspired by a conviction, however depressing, of the unfailing and pervading effects of unalterable natural laws. We have seen that the optimistic coloring rendered the ending of *Pillars of Society* quite acceptable to the general public. In *A Doll's House*, on the other hand, that coloring faded before the neutral contemplation of unvarnished facts. Yet even though in the last-named play the issue was joined sharply enough, the outcome was left in a manner indeterminate, so that to the intransigent optimist there was at least left the consoling possibility of a happy dénouement in the future.<sup>b</sup> In *Ghosts* the poor dear optimist is robbed even of this paltry alternative.

Again, the dialectic departure takes place from a premise with which we have just been made familiar. *Ghosts* is the harrowing after-story of a mismarriage. "To marry for external reasons, even if they be religious or moral, brings Nemesis upon the progeny."<sup>1</sup> Ibsen established his point by assuming a peculiarly aggravated, yet unfortunately not impossible, case. This time the woman, a perfectly "normal," womanly girl, an honor to her sex in every socially accredited way, and brought up in a strictly

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, p. 177.

orthodox fashion, had obediently permitted her parents to yoke her to a husband, not, as Helmer, good enough with the average albeit lacking in true fibre, but a slave of evil habits, an abject and vicious voluptuary, and a poisoner of his own house both in a figurative, moral, and a literal, pathological sense. After one year the wife's disgust conquers her scruples, she gathers courage to brave the opinion of society, and flies to the protection of a clergyman with whom she was formerly in love. "Here I am, take me." But Pastor Manders, although he returns her love, persuades her to return to her husband. No matter how unworthy the man, says the Church, the wife's place is beside him; and Society spoke to the same effect in Ibsen's sternly Lutheran land. Anything in this world rather than a scandal. Nearly thirty years afterward the reverend gentleman still thinks of the episode with a shudder: "It was inconsiderate of you to an unheard-of degree to have sought refuge with me." Yet he refers to it as the greatest victory of his life. Helen answers him: "It was a crime against us both."<sup>1</sup> This notion, that to choke off the imperative call of a deep affection is an unpardonable spiritual crime, a sort of double murder, bound to draw vengeance upon the perpetrator, is one of Ibsen's fixed convictions. In *John Gabriel Borkman* the idea is stated more emphatically than in *Ghosts*, and in *When We Dead Awaken* it pervades the entire action as its ethical message. In Ibsen's writings a motive is always sounded softly at first, like a secondary incidental strain, and after that it gradually swells till it reaches a thematic importance. The rest of Helen Alving's story is doubtless

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VII, p. 226. '

remembered, as Ibsen's plots are never complicated. Helen's courage had failed her when the expected helper proved himself a slave to the "ghosts" of social prejudice she was about to exorcise from her soul; so she slipped back into her marital life of shame. Her submission at first sprang not from cowardice, rather from piety toward the orthodox ideas of duty to which Pastor Manders had recalled her. Having once for all committed the heinous blunder of appealing to the minister when she ought to have consulted the doctor and the lawyer, she must bear the fruit of her sin against herself. That fruit is her son Oswald. So it looks as if an undercurrent of tragic guilt were not absent from Helen's appalling destiny. Though she soon found out that her perpetual sacrifice was worse than in vain, yet she did not brace herself to another act of open mutiny, but continued her self-immolation upon the altar of domestic duty. She separates from her child, lest he grow up in the polluted atmosphere of his home, where things are going from bad to worse. With the silent agony of a martyr she continues to pay her alleged obligations to the despotic law of Society. She connives at the husband's drunken carousals to the point of almost participating in his dissipations, and winces mutely under insupportable affronts. At last, shortly after pausing, from sheer exhaustion, in his turbulent excesses, the riotous soul, having been converted in the nick of time, departs to cease from troubling. Helen Alving is free.

Up to this point her behavior might be made wholly intelligible by certain charitable assumptions. Her submission could easily pass for Christian meekness, were she, in religious matters, in agreement with the orthodoxy of a

Pastor Manders. For Ibsen maintains that Christianity has a paralyzing effect on the "will to live."<sup>1</sup> It would accordingly behoove the student of Mrs. Alving's character to seek evidence of her intense religiousness. An opposite state of mind, namely, the lack of controlling convictions in regard to the ultimates of life, would serve almost as well to explain her rigid attitude of non-resistance. For men and women, in the absence of religious or philosophical standards of their own, do well to look beyond their own instincts or consciences for guidance and sanction. Now what puzzles us is that Helen's recoil from baleful conventions should be so carefully disguised even after Captain Alving's death, that she should make all pretense about holding the old sinner's memory dear, should scheme to make his career look meritorious to the outside world, and by tricks and lies strive to deepen the boy's reverence for the sanctified memory of the unspeakable old scamp. To be sure, the deceased chamberlain's after-fame is not the only end she has in mind in founding the orphanage. It is a good enterprise in itself, and is to rid Oswald of his curse-laden patrimony. "From after to-morrow it shall be for me as if the departed had never lived in this house. Nobody shall be here but my son and his mother."<sup>2</sup> To repeat, this conduct puzzles us, although any child can see, of course, that all the hypocrisy is practiced for a good purpose. None the less, it is hypocrisy, and here we have touched what, by the standards of uncompromising truth, must be adjudged a grave dereliction. Mrs. Alving reveals herself in the progress of the drama as one possessed of firm views of life to which her actions run coun-

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. VII, p. 213.



ter. Hence her conduct of life, however sanctified by its pathetic appeal to our compassion, must be viewed from Ibsen's idealistic premises as fundamentally and destructively dishonest. Outwardly she conforms to all the social ordinances, no matter how mendacious and unjust. Inwardly she is bitterly disposed towards them and holds them in utter contempt. The spiritual revolution started when her first great self-conquest had proved vain. It was after the return from her flight. "It was then that I began to look into the seams of your doctrines. I wanted to undo but a single knot; but when I had got that undone, the whole thing unravelled out. And then I understood that it was all machine-sewn."<sup>1</sup> From this realization she progresses step by step in inward rebellion to the position of absolute nihilism. To his friend, the critic Sophius Schandorph, the poet explains: "Just because she is a woman she will go to the extremest limits once she has begun."<sup>2</sup> Helen Alving is the most inveterate agnostic, and perhaps anarchist, whom Ibsen has portrayed. On one occasion she bursts out: "Oh, that everlasting law and order! I often think that does all the mischief in the world."<sup>3</sup> She is right, in so far as there may be, and always have been, laws that are contrary to nature and have sprung only from the unintelligence of authorized law-makers; she is wrong, so far as good laws are concerned, based on the nature of men and things. Her own life is blameless beyond a shadow of doubt, but her belief in the necessity of morals is wholly undermined. Indeed, her unscrupulousness goes beyond belief. When Oswald sees his only hope of salvation in a marriage with Regine,

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VII, p. 226.<sup>2</sup> *C*, p. 352.<sup>3</sup> Vol. VII, p. 220.

whom Mrs. Alving knows to be his half-sister, the mother allays her natural repugnance with the frightful thought that such marriages are not against the order of nature, nor can they be prevented so long as men lead polygamous lives. (Ibsen, nevertheless, evaded the responsibility of a direct reply to the question whether Mrs. Alving would actually have permitted Oswald and Regine to marry.) And this same over-woman, who has set her inner existence free from all the trammels and restrictions by which civilized men and women consider themselves bound, has not had the audacity to brave public opinion to the extent of deserting her husband. Raised by her intellect high above the child-wife of Torvald Helmer, she lacked Nora's courage to defy the views and prejudices of her social environment. Too late comes her resolve: "I must have done with all this constraint and insincerity. I can endure it no longer. I must work my way out to freedom."<sup>1</sup> Herein lies the source of the tragedy.

*Ghosts* has appropriately been termed by Paul Schlenker<sup>2</sup> the tragedy of the *mater dolorosa*. It makes us witness the shuddering spectacle of a mother vicariously tortured by the cruel fate that descends on her child. It is wrong to regard Oswald as the principal figure in this play. That part, beyond a peradventure, belongs to Helen Alving, the greatest woman character created by Ibsen. Her tragic function is not only to typify the sadness and uselessness of much of the sacrifice that comes into the life of a dutiful wife and mother; to him who looks deeper there is also revealed her share in the responsibility for the catastrophe. For in this tragedy the play-

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VII, p. 220.

<sup>2</sup> *SW*, vol. VII, p. x.

wright strikes an effective blow at the proverbial and therefore questionable truth, *suæ quisque faber fortunæ*. Oswald is no more the author of his own fate than is *Ædipus*. *Ghosts* would be a fate tragedy pure and simple if Oswald were to be regarded as the hero. His destinies are all predetermined by evil hereditary influence. In his worm-eaten existence the sins of his profligate father are led to expiation. He can say with the poet Maurice Barrès, "Je ne puis vivre que selon mes morts." It was Dr. Rank in *A Doll's House*, who complained that his poor spinal marrow had to suffer for the peccadilloes of his father; note again how the submediant tone of an earlier theme swells here with the burden of a larger dramatic significance. Yet in spite of that, Oswald is not to be thought of as the hero of *Ghosts*. Or can his piteous end, as the night of idiocy settles upon him, be compared for an instant in tragical grandeur to the stupendous situation of a mother preparing to take with her own hands the life that she has brought into the world?

‡ That the tremendous and incredibly subtle psychological invention, whereby a mother is confronted with child-murder as her solemn and sacred duty, raised up a perfect fury of indignation will be readily understood by any one at all familiar with the ordinary maudlin way in which the painful experiences of mothers are exploited for the sentimental delectation of Anglo-Saxon men and matrons. If we will descend for a moment from the sublime to the ridiculous, we shall mark quickly the contrast between Ibsen's stern presentment and the saccharine morality of the so-called "clean play," which by its rigid exclusion of the disagreeable enjoys in this country the

uncritical championship of myriads of otherwise intelligent persons. I follow a competent critic's account of the performance of such a clean play: —

There was recently produced in Chicago a play by Jules Goodman, called "Mother," one of those plays technically described as possessing "heart interest." A mother is shown making all possible sacrifices for her erring offspring, who lie, forge, and insult her. But mother shouldered all trials and all blame, even for the forgery. You are obviously expected to admire as well as to pity her, to regard her as a noble embodiment of "mother love." Actually, the speech and conduct of her children show that she was but ill fitted for the duties of motherhood, and in so far quite the opposite of admirable. Here is a play of the type known as "wholesome," and intended to impart a great moral uplift. Actually, while it makes susceptible female auditors weep and have a perfectly lovely time, it is based on immorality, on that terrible and often innocent immorality of incompetent parenthood. Had the author sincerely thought out the meaning of his play, had he reasoned down to first principles, he would have made this mother's acts not those of moral heroism, but of belated atonement.<sup>c</sup>

The most furious onslaught ever made against any play was led against *Ghosts*. The excited champions of morality hurried to the front of the attack, because, as we know, "all art is immoral for the inartistic." The critics, without looking deeply into the facts of the matter, proceeded to put willful misconstructions upon the intentions of the drama. All the world seemed to rise with one accord to cry anathema and maranatha forever against this unsavory Northerner, who, like Homer's doleful seer, spoke always of ill. Ibsen was excoriated as a corrupting influence; made example of as a writer devoting the stage to analyses of whatever is repugnant and depraved; an individual

who was most comfortable and happy when wallowing in mean sties. For fine moral indignation at real art and virtuous vituperation of great artists there is no land on earth like England, our own country always excepted. After the performance of *Ghosts* the name of Henrik Ibsen became for the Anglo-Saxon public a synonym for everything that is base and disgusting. In this grand general assault gentle and fervid souls like Sir Edwin Arnold and Mr. Clement Scott, the renowned dramatic critic, did not scruple to wield the weapons of common scolds. In the ardent defense of public decency these gentlemen felt constrained to use language so strident and violent and venomous and foul that the iniquitous and repelling object of the attack would have been wholly at a loss to match their billingsgate out of his entire vocabulary.<sup>d</sup> We owe the preservation of the choice dictionary of abuse to Mr. William Archer's *Ghosts and Gibberings*<sup>e</sup> and to Shaw's *Quintessence of Ibsenism*.<sup>f</sup> "Bestial," "poisonous," "sickly," "indecent," "loathsome," "fetid" are some of the epithets used. The work of Ibsen is described as "literary carrion." To this day there are would-be critics who, with the dangerous fatuity of generalization, classify Ibsen as an apostle of pruriency and hideousness because he would not gloze the vital matters. No charge could be more insecurely founded. In fact, Ibsen's make and manner, artistic as well as personal, were distinguished by purity of an almost exceptional degree. He was not a "muck-raker" but a truth-seeker, and never selected a subject because of its intrinsic loathsomeness. His subject-matter was life, and since he resolved to couch it in terms of breathing humanity, experience and imagination con-



jointly led him to dramatize one of the newest and foremost scientific acquisitions of his age. He held that in our time every poetical work has the mission to stake out a widened area of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Being the first to apply with luminous vision the law of heredity in drama, — as Flaubert and Balzac had already done in the novel and Zola was then continuing to do, — Ibsen did not care to blind either himself or his audience to the pathological aspects that are inwrought with the very texture of human life. In order to make people understand a human tragedy, the poet has to expose its facts. And since the conflicts and sufferings of life dramatized themselves in Ibsen's imagination spontaneously and with imperative urgency, it became unavoidable for him to admit physical and moral corruption into the presence of his audience. He did this, however, with great delicacy and restraint. We need only to think of the noteworthy discretion shown in the handling of such a terrible and revolting subject as that of Rebecca West's antecedents in *Rosmersholm* or the ticklish situation between Alfred and Asta in *Little Eyolf*. In no case did he indulge in the untempered presentment of horrible things otherwise than when compelled to do so by the exigencies of his art, that is, in order to clear up the necessary assumptions for his plots. He dwells, legitimately, on disease in so far as it has a shaping influence on the fates of his persons. He never described a disease for its own sake, after the fashion of certain naturalists. It is untrue that his plays are pervaded by "hospital air." It is entirely true, on the other hand, that he did not shrink from presenting pathological characters

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, p. 205.

whenever this became an artistic necessity. Abnormal individuals, with a psychic taint, are found in too large number, seemingly; but it must not be forgotten that statistically it has been demonstrated that the Norwegians are strongly predisposed to mental disorders; moreover, that there is a large margin of uncertainty in the dramas, as there is in real life, concerning the question of sanity. Earl Skule, in *The Pretenders*, has been pronounced unbalanced by one of the foremost interpreters of Ibsen. Emperor Julian is a full-fledged paranoiac Gerd, in *Peer Gynt*, is downright insane, whereas the Ratwife in *Little Eyolf* may pass for merely eccentric. Hilmar Tønnesen, in *Pillars of Society*, is a typical neurasthenic, morbidly fearsome, and incapable of the concentration requisite for any definite work; his nerves are set on edge by loud voices; the notes of a clarionet are enough to upset him; he "enjoys poor health" and loves to descant on his sufferings, much like the insufferable *malade imaginaire*, Mr. Fairlie, in Wilkie Collins's *Woman in White*, whom in some respects he vividly calls to one's mind.

Whereas most of Ibsen's patients are of secondary or merely episodical importance, as for instance the moribund Dr. Rank in *A Doll's House*, whose case, medically far from unobjectionable, has been defined as congenital *tabes dorsalis*, Oswald Alving's fatal infirmity is, of course, of prime significance for the course of the tragedy. But even against *Ghosts* the charge of loathsomeness is untenable. The use of the ugly in tragedy has been ably defended before the nineteenth century in the theoretical writings of Lessing and Schiller,<sup>h</sup> the very dramatists who are still ignorantly cited against Ibsen; and the theme in

*Ghosts*, though repulsive enough by its very nature, seems dainty by the side of ancient tragedies like the *Œdipus*, the *Philoctetes*, or the *Ajax Mainomenos*. For Ibsen, who never had the least use for the sort of realism *à la* Zola, could refrain from uncovering the foul sores and festering wounds of his sufferers, because he had the advantage over the great Grecian tragedians that his analytical method permitted him to attenuate all horrors through indirect and gradual exposure. Undeniably, the play is dreadful enough for all that, dreadful as a whole and in many details; but not in a single respect is it disgusting to the feelings of serious-minded people. And let objectors be reminded once for all that tragedy is not meant for weaklings, triflers, and prudes. It is meant for serious minds and valiant nerves. That is perhaps why Heinrich von Kleist in his day would have debarred women from the theatre, and why no women were admitted to the plays of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides as performed in the Theatre of Dionysos, excepting alone the Priestess of Demeter.

Another charge against Ibsen, supported among others by the celebrated neuro-pathologist, Auguste Forel, is that the pathognomic aspects of Ibsen's characters are sometimes falsified. Ibsen is disavowed by the medical profession as a compounder of artificial diseases. And as regards the inherited malady of Oswald Alving in particular, it is pointed out that the theory underlying Ibsen's views on the subject has been revised and modified in recent times. (Oswald's case may be defined as progressive paralysis caused by prenatal luetic infection. It is objected that the outbreak of the disease in him could

hardly occur so late in life.) That the artistic or ethical force of *Ghosts* has been in the least affected by the advance of science, I for one do not believe, despite the dictum of many critics. Ibsen wisely confined himself, with his necessarily limited knowledge of a new science, to what appeared to him and his generation as the main fact; and I cannot think that the thrill which this play unfailingly communicates to the public is in any way lessened by whatever doubt may be put upon the accuracy of the scientific assumption in all its details. On the stage it is the total impression which decides, and minutiae need not by any means be slavishly copied from reality; that is impossible anyway, even in naturalistic drama. And granting, as we must, that the Biblical and biological lesson that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children is overstrained, it is not too much to claim for the social service rendered by *Ghosts*, that this play has done more to disseminate a popular interest in eugenics and possibly in social prophylaxis than any other single effort has been able to do. (Christian "Science," to be sure, rises superior to such methods of reform. Miss Lord, in the introduction to her translation of *Ghosts*, would have averted the fatal issue and reclaimed Oswald from idiocy by means of "scientific" treatment. Imagine Mrs. Alving attending the "Mother Church"! ) Medical authorities may silence their objections to the play if they will consider that as a wholesome deterrent from loose living it goes toward balancing the influence of some recent scientific skepticism.

Whether true or false, accurate or exaggerated, such a play as *Ghosts* could not escape the prohibitory index of

the powers that ruled the theatre. Suppose it *were* all true, said Ibsen's adversaries, suppose society *were* the pestiferous bog which it is here represented as being, what good can come of stirring it up? People do not come to the theatre for that; — the ancient, irrefutable argument, which goes to show that in the year 1881 Continental Europeans still clung to their cherished share of that crass ignorance in things pertaining to the drama which since that time seems to have passed into the undisputed and exclusive custody of the Anglo-Saxon race.

The principal opposition to the play derived, however, not from æsthetic and scientific objections, but from mistaken notions concerning its moral intentions. *Ghosts* was believed to carry in it the seeds of blank anarchism. The conclusion was drawn that the poet must be a dangerous enemy of the people. Mrs. Alving's words were taken to express the author's own lawless convictions; Pastor Manders was viewed as a scornful caricature of the clergy. Ibsen's own explanation of the general outcry against him is exceedingly instructive, though hardly adequate. On January 3, 1882, he wrote to George Brandes: —

. . . In that country [Norway] a great many of the critics are theologians, more or less disguised; and these gentlemen are, as a rule, quite unable to write rationally about creative literature. That enfeeblement of judgment which, at least in the case of the average man, is an inevitable consequence of prolonged occupation with theological studies, betrays itself more especially in the judging of human character, human actions, and human motives.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *C*, p. 349.



A few days later he complains to another Danish sympathizer of the "unquestionable talent" of the reviewers for misunderstanding and misinterpreting. He strenuously denies having hurled forth into the world his own violent shafts from under the shields of his *dramatis personæ*. With some exaggeration, probably, he says: —

There is in the whole book not a single opinion, a single utterance, which can be laid to the account of the author. I took good care to avoid this. The very method, the order of technique which imposes its form upon the play, forbids the author to appear in the speeches of his characters. My object was to make the reader feel that he was going through a piece of real experience; and nothing could more effectually prevent such an impression than the intrusion of the author's private opinions into the dialogue. . . . In no other play that I have written is the author so external to the action, so entirely absent from it, as in this last.<sup>1</sup>

Near the close of his life he issued to one of his French expositors, M. Ossip-Lourié, a wholesale warning against confounding the author with the characters, which again is undoubtedly somewhat over-emphatic: —

I am much obliged to you for kindly offering to publish some thoughts extracted from my works, and with great pleasure grant the desired approval. I only ask you to remember that the thoughts expressed in my dramas belong to my dramatic characters, who express them, and are not directly from me either in form or content.<sup>2</sup>

Mingled with the hubbub of indignation was heard a modicum of not altogether judicious partisan praise which only helped to damage still further the reputation of the drama and its author; as when Mr. Bernard Shaw broke

<sup>1</sup> *C*, p. 352.

<sup>2</sup> *SNL*, p. 120.

into the concord of the harmonious critics with the cool assertion, made in the *Saturday Review*, that Ibsen was superior to Shakespeare. In spite of the brilliant and courageous championship of the two greatest Scandinavian men of letters, Björnson<sup>1</sup> and Brandes, the play was extremely slow to gain open admittance to the stage. Apart from sporadic private performances, the theatres of the Scandinavian countries barred their doors against *Ghosts*, either at the behest of the official censor or in deference to the squeamishness of public opinion, for more than twenty years. Still, in Germany it has been a fixture in the repertory since 1894. In the same year a timorous attempt was even made to smuggle *Ghosts* into the United States; a performance, by the way, characterized by Mr. W. D. Howells as the very greatest theatrical event of his life's experience. The first American "run" dates from 1899, when Miss Mary Shaw "starred" as Mrs. Alving continuously for thirty-seven weeks. She deserves credit as the first American actress bold enough to bring an Ibsen play before the general public. In England a young Dutchman, named J. T. Grein, had already had the courage to give *Ghosts* in his "Independent Theatre" for a private audience (March 13, 1891). Slowly the great drama forged its way against the formidable antagonism to the respectful attention of every serious playgoer in Europe. By 1906 at last, — a quarter of a century after its birth, — the embargo on Ibsen's masterpiece had been raised everywhere except in England, where, however, at last reports

<sup>1</sup> Björnson's manful defense of *Ghosts* elicited Ibsen's warmest gratitude; cf. *C*, p. 354. To Brandes also he expressed his thanks; cf. *C*, p. 349.

the rigid quarantine against *Ghosts* and new ideas in general is desperately imperiled. Unquestionably, *Ghosts* has exerted an incalculably greater influence upon the younger generation of playwrights than any other drama of the period. It is no mere coincidence, but an event full of meaning, that the "Freie Bühne" of Berlin, that cradle of modern German drama, opened its first campaign (1889) with *Gespenster*. Events have thus refuted critical arrogance like that of the thundering, blundering Mr. Labouchere, who waved Ibsen aside with the stupid hyperbole: "Outside a silly clique, there is not the slightest interest in the Scandinavian humbug or all his works." This utterance of *Truth* has been given the lie by every known test of literary history and criticism; critical perspective has only enhanced the admiration for Ibsen; and *Ghosts* stands forth to-day as one of the great tragedies in the world's literature.

I have advisedly named *Ghosts* a masterpiece, and am constrained for once to differ entirely from Mr. Archer when, by an astonishing whim of his excellent critical insight, he would exclude this drama from the select half-dozen of Ibsen's greatest works. The distinguished critic and editor supports his position by citing a number of flaws and weaknesses, some real, some fancied. It is, for instance, true that Pastor Manders is too "typical"; whereas the emphasis laid on the question of insuring the memorial building in the conversation between Manders and Mrs. Alving<sup>1</sup> is not, in my opinion, open to the charge of unclearness. At all events, these are minor blemishes. Mr. Archer might have pointed out a few

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VII, p. 182 f.

more serious dramatic offenses that have apparently escaped most critics. There is a flagrant contradiction between two very important premises of the plot. In Act II Oswald asserts with unquestioned earnestness that he has never led a dissipated life — never, in any respect. And yet he blames himself, almost in the same breath, for having thrown away, “shamefully, thoughtlessly, recklessly,” his own happiness, health, everything in the world, — his future, his very life, — by taking part with his comrades in “that light-hearted, glorious life” of theirs. “It had been too much for my strength. So I had brought it upon myself.”<sup>1</sup> Maybe we are led into this perplexing contradiction by that Paris doctor with his blunt and highly improbable diagnosis of Oswald’s case and his cocksure prediction that the next attack would be fatal. We are really left in the dark as to Oswald’s past conduct of life. All we know of a certainty is that he has had a disgracefully dissipated father. But what are these slight blemishes beside the surpassing artistic beauty of the play? We should, of course, admit that the ultimate approbation of *Ghosts* was due to the remarkable power of the convictions voiced. Still, even considered as a stage play pure and simple, the tragedy is none the less absorbing.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VII, p. 248 f.

## CHAPTER X

### IBSEN AND THE NEW DRAMA

*GHOSTS* unquestionably marked an era in the history of the theatre, both because of its technical innovations and because of its revised conception of the spirit of tragedy. It seems advisable to digress somewhat from our main consideration in order to devote some attention to these aspects of Ibsen's plays.

In *Ghosts* the most effective lever of ancient tragedy is adapted to modern purposes. The Greek belief in a blind all-ruling Fate is revived in a form to correspond with our present beliefs. It was not a buried superstition raised out of its grave, like the fate idea in Schiller's *The Bride of Messina* and in the notorious "fate" tragedies of Müllner, Werner, and Houwald; the Nemesis of the Greeks could not be revived: that was proved conclusively by the experience of those dramatists and their disciples. A more modern view of destiny was pronounced in Schiller's *Wallenstein*, by the heroic thesis, "In deiner Brust sind deines Schicksals Sterne" (In thy own bosom lie the stars of thy destiny). Wallenstein's Nemesis is his conscience. The heroes of the classic German drama either conquer through the superior power of their will, or they perish in the clash with other wills stronger than theirs. This conception of poetic justice was formed during the Reformation, and Shakespeare was its greatest herald before Schiller. The older notion of an omnipotent,



external *Fatum* meting out its gifts to mortals without any regard to their deserts had long been obsolete when our own age matured a new theory of life which eventually restored to drama that tremendous concept of an overwhelmingly powerful fate whose absolute fixity is compatible with our empirical beliefs. Science has persistently and consistently hammered into our consciousness the law of nature by which the Past is responsible for the Present. "Heredity is Nemesis without her mask; the last of the Fates, and the most terrible." <sup>a</sup> And the knowledge of that great law, far from paralyzing our will and our conscience, has operated to stimulate them to an extraordinary degree. Ibsen, with a keen presentiment of the wholesome effect of this fresh departure of human thought, installed and firmly domiciled the régime of Evolution in the domain of the drama.

Since in its plan and all details of its construction *Ghosts* is a very marvel of that novel workmanship for which the poet had striven through so many years, we may well pause for a brief consideration of Ibsen's technique.

In *Ghosts* we remark a total absence of non-dramatical features. There are no monologues, no "asides," no *extra partem* comments designed for the exclusive enlightenment of the auditors, nor flowing "narrative" portions to interrupt the eddying current of the action. The author leaves his characters strictly alone, never intruding his own person on their company in some thin disguise or other. There is no copious speech-making. Thoughts and emotions are expressed solely through character and actions. The premises of the action are skillfully scattered

over the whole plot, instead of being massed at the beginning according to the old-fashioned idea about "exposition." We are led *in medias res*, into a portentous situation, with the crisis impending. The events whose influences now conspire to the tragical working-out belong to the long ago; our eyes are gradually and in a natural manner opened to the past history, which is skillfully resolved into dialogue.

Playwrights of modern ways of thinking have quite accustomed us to this species of drama, termed very appropriately by Richard M. Meyer, "Drama des reifen Zustandes" (drama of the ripened situation), and by Hermann Schlag<sup>b</sup> the drama with a recessive action ("rückläufige Handlung"); but as a matter of fact this method, sometimes described as "Auswirkung" (explication), because the fabric is finished at the outset and the main purpose of the action is to disentangle the strands so as to show how the texture was made, is as old as tragedy itself. It is used to some extent in practically every play that has ever been written, for nearly always some antecedents have to be accounted for. In the nature of things, most dramas must combine two types of action: the "synthetic," which develops within the play, and the "analytic," which is already completed, but first comes to light in the course of the play. Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schiller favored on the whole the synthetic style of dramaturgy. The ancients practiced an eclectic method, but as a rule synthesis predominated with them; yet Sophocles's *King Œdipus* is pronouncedly analytical all the way through. Analysis had been applied by moderns before Ibsen more in comedy and farce than in the solemn *genres*;

Heinrich von Kleist's *Der zerbrochene Krug* is the paragon of analytical comedy. Ibsen in his earlier plays followed the synthetic fashion (*Love's Comedy*, *The Pretenders*, *Brand*, *Peer Gynt*, *Emperor and Galilean*), and also in one of the later plays, *An Enemy of the People*. In *Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, *The Lady from the Sea*, and still other dramas of the middle period the two types are blended or combined. In *Ghosts* the analytical mode, which was partly used already in *Lady Inger* and *The Vikings*, completely rules the action. The same is true of *Rosmersholm*, *The Wild Duck*, *John Gabriel Borkman*.<sup>c</sup>

Even though in drama of the analytical sort the tragic interest is fixedly directed upon the past, a tense and well-governed present action is nevertheless necessary. In the *Ædipus* this indispensable factor of actuality is supplied by the King's determination to clear up the secret of his own past; an energy almost amounting to violence pushes the action from phase to phase amid our breathless excitement; in Kleist's great comedy, on the contrary, the present action is retardative, consisting in the stubborn resistance of Justice Adam to his oncoming fiasco and in his frantic efforts to prevent exposure. In Schiller's opinion, as expressed in a letter to Goethe, a very great advantage of the recessive procedure was to be derived from the fact that a past event, being unalterable, is thereby rendered more hopelessly terrifying; also, Schiller thought, the mind is more deeply stirred by the fear that something may have happened than by any fear of its happening in the future.

It must not be imagined that able dramatists reveal the antecedent history of their plots by set and

uniform rules. There are, indeed, some stereotyped contrivances for the purpose, but Ibsen preferred to steer clear of their manifest dangers. He skillfully managed to evade the hackneyed forms of "solo" <sup>d</sup> recitation and to free all prolonged rehearsals of the past from their usual dryness and stiffness. The recipients of the report are always persons strongly interested; frequently the hesitancy of the speaker, his reluctance to tell his story, is made an effective auxiliary factor: Gina (*The Wild Duck*), Rebecca (*Rosmersholm*), or Ellida (*The Lady from the Sea*) are cases in point. <sup>e</sup> Then, too, Ibsen is unexcelled in the skill with which the past is introduced into the story. The usual device is to bring together persons who had long been separated and now, in a perfectly natural manner, enlighten each other in regard to what has occurred since their last meeting. <sup>f</sup>

Frequently the "erregende Moment" (inciting moment) is supplied by the unexpected entrance of some one involved in the past plot. Occasionally Ibsen does not shrink from a plain *coup de théâtre*, in bringing about a sudden appearance. As instance, the ominous significance of Krogstad's appearances in Nora's house, mentioned before. Here the surprise amounts to an ironical anticlimax, and the same is true in *Pillars of Society* when Bernick asks indulgence for those foreigners, whose conduct "cannot affect us," at which very moment enters Lona Hessel; <sup>1</sup> and in *The Wild Duck* when Hjalmar expresses his domestic contentment: "With all my heart I say: here dwells my happiness," whereat Gregers Werle makes his entrance. <sup>2</sup> Most striking of all is an incident in *The*

<sup>1</sup> Vol. vi, p. 267.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. viii, p. 248.

*Master Builder*. Solness predicts that "some fine day the young era will come along and knock at the door . . . then it is all up with Solness the Builder"; at that very moment Hilda Wangel knocks at the door.<sup>1</sup>

The number of Ibsen's *dramatis personæ* was variable within wide limits. He was quite competent to "handle a mob" on the scene, as is seen in the earlier plays, notably *Brand*, *Peer Gynt*, *The Pretenders*, and *Emperor and Galilean*. In the social plays the *ensemble* is reduced to about six or eight characters; but these are studied with minutest care.

In spiritual portraiture Ibsen is not one of those dramatists whose prime concern is to show human character in the making; with certain notable exceptions the persons are presented in a state of maturity and completion. The object of the play is, then, to show them for what they are, in action and reaction, and to explain them, in a way, by lifting gradually the curtain from over their past history. In this endeavor the characterization is occasionally carried so far as to impede the action. In the social plays a rather novel though quite legitimate employment is given to the factor of suspense. The audience, namely, is permitted at first to misjudge the principal characters — just as in real life characters are seldom read aright by the observer, for character, both in life and in drama, is complex, and the observer, as a rule, is simple. In Ibsen's dramas, the final revelation is sometimes extremely surprising, but always, æsthetically speaking, supremely satisfying, since no trickery is employed, and every characteristic act well motivated; also, let us add, in passing,

<sup>1</sup> Vol. x, p. 224.



that Ibsen's characters improve on closer acquaintance in their moral worth; at least they come out better in our estimation in the long run than was to have been expected from first impressions: a sign, again, that points to anything but confirmed misanthropy in the author.

Ibsen's characters, it cannot be asserted too often, are men and women, not types. It is curious how even lucid critics, through their contemplation of Ibsen's figures as "visualized abstractions," may arrive at a total misconception of their supposed symbolical essence. Professor Paul H. Grumann, for example, after defining the "new" symbolism in such manner as to make it practically identical with the old-fashioned type-delineation still practiced by clumsy playwrights, comes to the following oblique characterizations: —

In Nora, we see the type of the woman of strong individuality; in Mrs. Alving, the well-intentioned opportunist who makes the best of a bad situation; in Dr. Stockmann, the scientific idealist; in Hedda Gabler, the strong-willed, self-respecting aristocrat; in Borkman, the constructive promoter; in Solness, the conceited promoter who does not learn his profession, but uses spurious and unprincipled means to bolster up his deficiencies.<sup>9</sup>

This critic, neglecting Goethe's immortal lesson on this ancient question, has unintentionally taken symbolism in its traditional sense, the very thing against which at the outset of his otherwise able article he warns us, the sense, namely, "according to which a special significance is arbitrarily attached to stated things." With Ibsen each character stands for his own ideas or principles or convictions, which are not necessarily representative of social groups and classes.

The subsidiary characters serve mainly to reinforce, either by analogy or by contrast, the ideas made prominent by the principals. To illustrate: In *Ghosts*, the pastor blames the bibulous joiner Engstrand for having married a fallen woman for the sake of a few hundred thalers. "And what have you to say about me," Mrs. Alving rejoins, "who went and married a fallen man?"<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Dr. Rank serves as a pendant to Nora, inasmuch as it is his wretched existence that opens her mind to her moral responsibility for her children's future. Again, Krogstad foreshadows to her the social consequences of her transgression. In *The Lady from the Sea*, Bal-leston, with his unfailing talent for "acclimatization," is an effective foil for Ellida, who feels in her environment like a fish out of water. In *Hedda Gabler* we have the contrasting figures of the heroine, whose life is void of aim and purpose and without use to anybody, and Juliana Tesman, who cannot exist save for the sake of others. In *John Gabriel Borkman* old Foldal has made a failure of his life like John Gabriel; his self-effacement before the man who has beggared him, and to whom he is the sole comforter in his forsakenness, is the other extreme from the insensate self-importance of the ex-captain of industry.

Ibsen adhered in most of his plays to the "unities." It has been wrongly supposed that in this he paid homage to stale and much falsified dramaturgical conventions which even by their inventors were more honored in the breach than in the observance. Ibsen had no reverence whatever for the spatial and temporal unities *per se*. He adhered to them for the sole reason that they thoroughly suited

<sup>1</sup> Vol. vii, p. 219.

his artistic intention; he strove by means of them for the all-important unity of tone or mood. It is in the nature of his plots that as a rule their actions proceed with great speed. Reich computes for *Ghosts* a length of about sixteen hours, for *Lady Inger* about five. In other plays the action is less condensed, yet never scattered over wide reaches of time. *A Doll's House* runs through about two days and a half, *Pillars of Society* and *The Lady from the Sea* approximate the same length, *Rosmersholm* fifty-two hours, *The Wild Duck* forty, and *Little Eyolf* thirty-six. But a proof that Ibsen was not committed to the "unities" lies in the fact that in the *Epilogue* the scene changes from act to act, and that between Acts I and II the principals have made a long journey. A stickler for technicalities might even raise a doubt whether the continuity of the action in *John Gabriel Borkman* is not so strict as in a measure to defeat its own purpose, seeing that under ordinary stage management a pause actually elapses between each two acts to allow for resetting the stage, whereas constructively the progress of the action in that drama is unbroken. (The difficulty, insurmountable in our theatres, can be readily overcome on the revolving stage that has been in use for many years past at numerous German playhouses.)

As for the dialogue in *Ghosts*, its perfection is of one piece with the rest of the technical qualities. Ibsen had revised his style of colloquy still further downward from the high-flown declamation characteristic of previous and contemporary schools of dramatists.<sup>1</sup> His language now tends still more uncompromisingly towards utmost

<sup>1</sup> Cf. pp. 129 ff., *supra*.

conciseness and plainness; like the action itself, it seems compacted into its essentials, a process calculated to enhance by much the force of a tragedy if only the theme be great. For only by strict abstention from all pious poetical fraud may the modern playwright convince us with ease that life is indeed stranger and unfortunately also more, far more, tragic than fiction.

Lastly, we may touch upon Ibsen's growing use of phrases that comprise the gist of personal philosophies; by these pet expressions his own intellectual trend is easily marked. In *Emperor and Galilean* there is much talk about the "third empire"; in *A Doll's House* about the "miracle"; in *Ghosts* there is the recurring phrase about the "joy of living"; in *An Enemy of the People* we hear about the "compact majority"; in *The League of Youth* about the "local situation"; and in *The Wild Duck* about the "ideal demand"; in *Rosmersholm* the guiding principle is compressed into the formula of the "happy noble men"; in *The Lady from the Sea* the maxims expounded are "in freedom of will" and "on one's own responsibility;" in *Little Eyolf* the words used as a guide through the thought of the action are "human responsibility" and "the law of change." There are many other such cue-words; for example, in *The Pretenders*, "the kingly thought"; in *Brand*, "All or naught"; in *Peer Gynt*, the command, "be true to thyself," contrasted with the advice, "be sufficient unto thyself" and "go round about." There is "the banner of the idea" (*Pillars of Society*); "acclimatization" (*The Lady from the Sea*); the "life-giving lie" (*The Wild Duck*); "vine-leaves in the hair" and "dying in beauty" (*Hedda Gabler*); "homes that bear a steeples" (*The Mas-*

*ter Builder*); "the great mortal sin" (*John Gabriel Borkman*), etc. Thus, in spite of his frequent scoffing at the imputation of "ideas" and "tendencies," Ibsen was the one to introduce in drama something closely akin to the musical *leitmotif* in Wagnerian opera. Yet the device is practiced with fair moderation, and rarely driven too hard.

In *Ghosts* the manner of Ibsen in invention and elaboration is permanently attained. It is a manner strikingly Ibsen's own. No artificialities of style connect this work with the ruling conventions, save perhaps the slightly melodramatic endings of the acts, Act I in particular, — the indelible mark of Ibsen's earlier training and his one spontaneous concession to the tastes of the public.

To his self-evolved style the poet remained lastingly true, unmoved by the excesses of a militant school of writers who owed to him perhaps the most powerful weapons in their armory. Never a great reader of books, he was almost totally ignorant of the theories and practices of the naturalists; even with Zola he had hardly more than a newspaper acquaintance. Critical incompetence can go no further than to classify Henrik Ibsen with the celebrated proclaimer of "la vérité vraie"; and then to impeach his veracious veracity on such grave counts as that Nora Helmer is still undecided on the twenty-fourth of December about the costume she will wear on the twenty-sixth! or, better still, that in *The Wild Duck* a herring salad is prepared inside of fifteen minutes, contrary to every law of nature!

Ibsen did not theorize much about his art and therefore was not in the least worried by his conscience about such



trifles. Nor even was he troubled about a seeming inconsistency of far greater consequence, namely, that between the severe outer simplicity of his plays and the lurking symbolism which everywhere deepens their meaning. On the contrary, it is worth noting that in each successive play the symbolism appears to be carried a little further. *Ghosts* may fairly be called a symbolical play. The title *Gengangere* is meant to suggest the idea that even the most freethinking amongst us are haunted by dead beliefs and superstitions. At the same time it refers to a certain ghastly habit life has of repeating itself. Throughout the action we are struck by meaningful coincidences: Oswald's resemblance to his father in looks, gesture, carriage, speech, the hideous revival through Oswald and Regine of that amorous scene between his father and her mother in the long ago. The parallelism is carried into detail. Mrs. Alving relates: "I heard my own servant maid whisper: 'Let me be, sir! Leave me alone!'" A little later in the scene a woman's voice is heard from the same dining-room: "Oswald! Take care! Are you out of your mind? Let me be!"<sup>1</sup> All the occurrences are accompanied by a sort of poetical sign-language; take, for example, the burning of the just completed orphanage by which Helen's intended final settlement with the past is frustrated. The method is deftly extended to the concurrent phenomena of nature: as when dusk begins to fall at the very moment when Oswald begins his confession<sup>2</sup> or when the sun bursts out at the very last as soon as the worst has come and our sense of creeping tenseness is relieved.<sup>h</sup> More than that, the play is enveloped from

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VII, pp. 206 and 213.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

start to finish in an atmosphere of weirdness and mystery. The shroud that veils the outside world from the beholder clothes portentous and incomprehensible forewarnings of destiny. The scene and the weather are partners in the action. A nervous depression is conveyed by the unceasingly falling rain. The mist that lies heavy over the landscape settles on our souls, the gloom of life descends upon the characters and the looker-on of their sad destinies.

This cheerless ground-quality of the play, as much perhaps as its imputed "immorality," called forth that savage roar of disapproval. Society in all its classes felt outraged as though by an unpardonable insult. Was *Ghosts* indeed a gross libel on society, or did perhaps its crime consist merely in an infringement of the general social "conspiracy of silence"? It is not easy to answer this to everybody's satisfaction. But suppose we were convinced with Henrik Ibsen that society is a pestiferous morass, what, then, should we do? Drain the filthy bog, or learn to step lightly and to deaden our sense of smell? At the time the compact majority was opposed to sanitation. And if our communal conscience now fosters somewhat different ideals of social hygiene, no small portion of the thanks is due to the much-maligned dramatist from Norway. His relation to our present-day development proves the wise words of Herbert Spencer: —

Whoever hesitates to utter that which he thinks the highest truth lest it should be too much in advance of the time, may reassure himself by looking at his acts from an impersonal point of view. Let him only realize the fact that opinion is the agency through which character adapts external arrangements to itself, — that his opinion rightly forms part of this agency, is a unit

of force, constituting, with other such units, the general power which works out social changes, — and he will perceive that he may properly give full utterance to his innermost conviction, leaving it to produce what effect it may.

The equally stupid and ferocious denunciation of *Ghosts* left Ibsen fairly cold. He had not refrained from speaking out plainly, although he knew what was coming. Once for all he had stopped meddling with compromise and halfway measures, and was living up to his convictions and ready to take the consequences. All the same, he was unwilling to let the case of "The People *versus* Henrik Ibsen" go against the defendant by default. He would make an exertion to set himself right. Yet even if public opinion refused to reverse itself, his criticism of society would be continued, in the teeth of general protest. That the self-defense assumed the form of a new drama, goes without saying.<sup>1</sup> But this drama differs from the others in that the personal element comes strongly to the fore. It is a dramatized *oratio pro domo*.

<sup>1</sup> On the authority of a recently published letter the assumed date of the completion of *An Enemy of the People* must be rectified. The play was finished at Rome, June 20, 1882. Cf. *SNL*, p. 98.

## CHAPTER XI

### AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

FOR once it may be charged that, contrary to his self-imposed rule of non-interference, in *An Enemy of the People* ("En Folkefiende," 1882) Ibsen did mount the stage in person and take its very centre; still Dr. Thomas Stockmann is not quite Henrik Ibsen, but rather a kindly auto-persiflage. The very name is significant, for it brings to mind the "Stockmannsgaard" at Skien wherein Ibsen spent his earliest youth. "I have made my studies and observations during the storm. Dr. Stockmann and I got on so excellently together. We harmonize in many respects"; yet, lest we identify too closely, he adds: "but the Doctor is a more muddle-headed man than I."<sup>1</sup> From a purely dramatic point of view, the invasion of personal polemics does not redound to the advantage of the play. It nullifies, among other things, the greatest technical achievement of the poet, namely, his skill in gradually exposing the past history of the *dramatis personæ*. Nor can it be said of this drama, that it is made up only of a fifth act, as is true of the other plays from *Pillars of Society* onward, for it proceeds in an old-fashioned progression of events to the catastrophe; and it differs from its predecessors also in the heightened sonancy of its preaching. On the other hand, it is excellently built up, — with the exception of Act IV, where the progress is halted

<sup>1</sup> C, p. 359.

by lengthy digressions, and with the further exception, possibly, of the ending which leaves everything and everybody *in statu quo*. Of Ibsen's serious dramas *An Enemy of the People* may safely be designated as the briskest and breeziest in movement. It was not hurriedly composed, but much more quickly than was the poet's wont; under the emotional stimulus of the provocation a few months sufficed to mature the work. Its story, to the shame of human nature must it be said, is not as far-fetched as it seems; observant persons cannot be at a loss to parallel it from their own experience; — or have we never heard of people to whom the size of a city's population and its volume of business are a more impressive measure of civic worth than is its enlightenment? — or of "syndicated" advertisers vetoing the publication of mortality reports during an incipient epidemic? Only a few months ago there came from the Austrian town of Riedau news of the tragic end of a conscientious young physician who was hounded to his death by resentful tradesmen and publicans because in his official capacity he had reported a case of typhoid fever and the town in consequence was put under quarantine during the lucrative period of the military manœuvres.<sup>a</sup>

In the dramatized parable of the tainted Spa, Ibsen delves again into a familiar problem. His views, with which we are already well acquainted, are now given a still more far-reaching expression. The whole state of society is broadly reviewed. In Ibsen's opinion, as it shimmers forth through the transparent symbolism of *An Enemy of the People*, the present social system is subversive of the social good. The health resort, meaning the



social institutions, is infected, a veritable pest-hole, — how shall those that know the facts deal with them? Must they advertise them, cost what it will, or should they keep their discovery quiet, lest the business interests be disturbed? Now, for a man of Ibsen's texture, to whose thinking untruthfulness is the source of all the evil on earth, it is an axiom that a truth as soon as recognized must be frankly and publicly uttered. Therefore his *locum tenens* on the boards that signify the world hesitates not a single moment. With him, the all too common sacrifice of conviction to expediency is a constitutional impossibility. With a far more than Ibsenite fervency of passion and a somewhat Bernickian love of strong effect he strikes at an important and immediate communal interest for the sake of a far more vital but also more remote one. In this wise he becomes an "Enemy of the People." Society, with its hand-to-mouth policy, rallies instinctively round the standard of its threatened prosperity. At first, a few people side with the doctor, mainly out of spite and envy against the ruling party, but they turn against him as soon as they realize that his scheme of change would involve a personal expense to them. So the reformer finds himself in the hopeless minority of one against the compact array of the "stagnationists." No, not even the cold comfort of total isolation is left him; one solitary citizen is stirred by his appeal, and he — the tragicomic portent of the incident is unmistakable — one densely befuddled with liquor. But when Stockmann finds himself deserted by all the world he holds his head still higher than before and cleaves even more strongly to his purpose. "The strongest man in the world is he who

stands most alone," he exclaims, in almost the identical phrase of Wilhelm Tell: "der Starke ist am mächtigsten allein." It sounds like an anti-social doctrine; but perhaps it is only meant to emphasize the well-known biologic value of isolation. The real personality needs solitude, so that his heart and soul may dwell wholly within him. The obligations imposed upon a ζῶον πολιτικόν lead inevitably to the curtailment of personality. "Success" in the world is gained mainly through moral compromises, in other words, through defection from strict justice and comprehended principles.

With every man's hand against him, who is right, we ask: Stockmann, or the People? the Individual or Society? Ibsen or his critics? This is the question debated in the play. The answer is direct to the point of brusqueness. In the words of another iconoclast, albeit of a quite different sort, "Public opinion is an attempt to organize the ignorance of the community and to elevate it to the dignity of physical force."<sup>b</sup> The mob holds its terrible power through its enormous inertia, and there is but one sure way of delivery for the individual from the incubus of the collective consciousness, the way shown by Stockmann in his exit from society into solitude. Inasmuch as Stockmann's extreme subjectivity voices unquestionably the author's own true conviction, it pronounces the latter utterly opposed to the leveling sociability so characteristic of our civilization. Democracy itself is stamped in this play as a fallacy and superstition; whoever supposes, with Stockmann, the fools to outnumber the sages, and the iniquitous the righteous, cannot think otherwise than that in a democracy justice and wisdom are most likely

to be overruled. What fate, then, may the practical idealist, otherwise the reformer, expect at the present democratic juncture in our civilization? The Mayor of New York asked, almost naïvely, after that attempt on his life: "Why is it that just as soon as you undertake to do what is right, you become unpopular?" But he at the same time gave voice to the same conviction by which Dr. Stockmann's conduct is impelled: that we have to order our decisions not in the hope that they will make us popular, but solely because they are just and right and necessary. A true idealist is not deterred from his purpose by what Faust bitterly declares to be the universal experience of men who came nearer the truth than their fellows and would not keep their discoveries to themselves.

"The few who thereof something really learned,  
Unwisely frank, with hearts that spurned concealing,  
And to the mob laid bare each thought and feeling,  
Have evermore been crucified and burned."

For it is of the nature of idealism not to learn from the experience of others; that is why the Stockmann family never dies out.

Such are the reflections to which we are led by the consideration of Stockmann as a direct representative of Ibsen. Yet the play, although it is the most polemical among all of Ibsen's social manifestoes, should not be viewed too one-sidedly as having arisen only out of personal animosities. We need to remind ourselves once more that Stockmann and Ibsen are by no means wholly identical. The fiery eloquence of this tribune of the people is too dissimilar to the crabbed taciturnity of Ibsen him-

self to make their identity plausible for a single moment. The poet purposely used other models in order to point away from himself. Once, by a casual remark, he pointed to George Brandes as Stockmann's prototype, but here again the concrete resemblance is too slight. The search for the real model brought forth numerous suggestions. Björnson and Jonas Lie have each been named as the original Stockmann. Professor Alfred Klaar discovered an interesting analogue to Stockmann in the person of Dr. Meissner, a physician at the famous Bohemian health-resort of Teplitz and the father of the well-known writer, Alfred Meissner. During the eighteen-thirties this man had frightened away the visitors by predicting a cholera epidemic. The season's prospective business was ruined by this scare, and the excited rabble came near stoning the doctor to death.<sup>6</sup> Since now, however, Stockmann's real archetype has been made definitely known<sup>1</sup> it seems best to give the substance of the facts, as showing how diligently Ibsen utilized outside material even though he never failed to impregnate it with his own spiritual experience.

In Christiania there lived till 1881 a pharmacist, Harald Thaulow by name (the father of the celebrated landscapist, Fritz Thaulow); a man of much knowledge, energy, and civic spirit, but known to friend and foe as a troublesome grumbler. In the early seventies this irascible controversialist started a war against a certain charitable association. In a number of peppery pamphlets he sought to show that the administration of the concern was

<sup>1</sup> Julius Elias, *Die neue Rundschau*, December, 1906, p. 1961; and *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. iv, p. 310 f.

unsound. One of these pamphlets, printed in 1880, bears the malicious title: *The Pillars of Society in Prose*. Already in 1874 Thaulow had caused a scandalous scene at the annual meeting. But of particular interest is the report in the daily *Aftenposten* of the annual meeting in 1881, which was held but two weeks before the querulous old gentleman's death. At that meeting he wildly denounced certain transactions of the board of directors as arrant fraud. For full three quarters of an hour he continued to heap rebukes and abuse upon the management, when finally the chairman was asked to give him the quietus. But Thaulow would not be choked off. What followed is here reproduced from the newspaper account which, conveniently enough, was given in dialogue form after the stenographic report: —

*Thaulow*. I will not have my mouth stopped. (Continues his reading.)

*Consul Hefty*. Make Mr. Thaulow stop!

(Thaulow continues to read. Several persons manifest their indignation by demonstratively walking about in the hall. The chairman asks the assembly whether they recognize his right to withdraw from Mr. Thaulow the privilege of the floor. Unanimous "Aye").

The chairman again requests Mr. Thaulow to stop.

*Thaulow*. I will not have my mouth gagged.

*Chairman*. In that case I proceed with —

*Thaulow*. I'll make it quite short. (Continues to read.)

*Hefty*. Is he permitted to read on?

*Thaulow* (continuing): The glorious results of this Society . . . I'm done in a minute.

*Hefty*. At this rate this general meeting will be broken up.

*Chairman*. I regret to have to interrupt Mr. Thaulow. Your remarks —



Thaulow goes on reading.

*Hefty*. Silence — or you will have to leave the room.

*Thaulow*. All right. (Sits down, exhausted.)

The chairman thereupon resumes the reading of the board's official report. Thaulow accompanies the reading with grunts and tries several times to obtain another hearing. At last, the opposition having grown too strong, he gives up the fight and leaves the hall with these words: "Now I'll have nothing more to do with you. I am tired of casting pearls before swine. It's an infernal abuse that is being dealt to a free people in a free country. So — and now good-bye . . . and shame to you."<sup>1</sup>

The suggestiveness of this report is readily seen, and Ibsen has put it to good use in the meeting scene of his play. Thus we see again how he fashioned his characters from within, yet lost no opportunity to study from the model, ever biding the moment when life should proffer the convincing forms for his ideas. It is this method makes this play in particular so vivid: the symbolical or parabolical meaning is borne in on a wave of fresh, swift-moving life, detached by virtue of its actuality from any straight-lined program the playwright might have set out with. Every real drama possesses a measure of independence of its maker. A true dramatist, in his often subconscious care to humanize his figures, may end by transforming the original concept as the result of the progressive clarification of his own mind during the work.<sup>4</sup>

Whether or no Stockmann is to be regarded as Ibsen's *alter ego*, the energetic doctor is at all events his manliest character, the one quite free from that softness peculiar to

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. iv, p. 311. While we thus have a clue to the genesis of *An Enemy of the People*, no sketches or jottings of any sort have been preserved, as they have for all the other social plays.

Ibsen's other heroes. But the poet saw, on closer inspection, that this representative of his views was not altogether in the right, and so, for the reader, too, there appears a wrong side as well as a right, to the character of Dr. Stockmann. Swayed though we are by the force and fire of his righteous pleading, the effect is not of permanent duration, for as soon as we are outside the spell of his wild and splendid eloquence, cool reflection shows a goodly share of our sympathy to have been merely aroused *a contrario* by contempt for the flat-brained time-servers on the other side of the dispute. Stockmann escapes a measure of condemnation at our hands mainly for the reason that almost anything seems less intolerable to the patience of enlightened persons than the rockbuilt solidarity of the mean and the stupid. (Dramatically considered, this fundamental presupposition of the action, according to which the entire population of a fair-sized town is made up of fools and rascals, cannot be deemed very realistic.) In the dialectics of the drama Stockmann's idealism is pretty well overhauled, so that we can hardly shut our eyes to his "muddle-headedness," and finally come to view his ejection from society as by no means wholly unmerited.<sup>1</sup> Considered in the concrete, his Quixotism would spell ruin to almost any useful enterprise. Really we have to fall back on the symbolical connotations of the plot in order to condone with a fairly clear conscience the headlong imprudence of the man. For all his splendid qualities he presents a classic case of blunder-

<sup>1</sup> For Stockmann's reputation as an unreasonable man and for his demonstration of unreasonableness, cf. especially vol. VIII, pp. 9, 14, 16, 64, 66, 73, 84, 128.

ing eccentricity. For remark: The medical officer of a place that owes its prosperity to the restorative virtues of its waters discovers one day that the waters are polluted. What course of action a man in his place would follow if favored with a cool mind and a steady view, is perfectly plain. If at first he encountered opposition, he would undoubtedly push his cause as far as possible through official channels before revolting openly against the authorities. Unfortunately our doctor is not so favored. It is a convenient opportunity for his implacable idealism to take the bit between its teeth and with closed eyes to run away with his not over-developed reasoning powers. The fact must be published regardless of whatever injury may come from it to the immediate interests of the place; that is the quickest way of securing an abatement of the evil conditions. The only thing needed to substantiate his charges is the confirmation of his opinion by high authority. Like any fanatical reformer, Stockmann rejoices in having his fatal diagnosis corroborated. He informs the editors of the local newspaper even before he has broached the matter officially! When the chairman of his board tries to tie his hands, he forthwith abandons the official course and rushes into the newspapers and mass meetings. So obsessed is he with the one purpose that all counter-considerations are brushed away with feverish excitement; neither the grave perils to the community nor his own and his family's certain ruin, sure results of the precipitous publication of his discovery, find a way to his reason. It is fair to ask: What good can come from the clash of such a bootless idealist as this Dr. Stockmann, impulsive, indiscreet, and overstrained, with

the "compact majority" of sordid philistines arrayed solidly against him? Idealism should go with a goodly measure of common sense. No true and lasting benefit comes to the world through the most enthusiastic reformer when his power for good is so largely neutralized by his social ineptness.

We seem, then, to have indicated two opposite ethical interpretations of *An Enemy of the People*, but in reality they do not stand in a basic contradiction. On the contrary, they will appear quite consistent with each other if Ibsen's penetrating power of sight is remembered in conjunction with the fact that primarily he is neither the faithful recorder of his own life and character nor the willful caricaturist of himself or others. He is primarily an artist; the people of his dramas, accordingly, are sufficiently alive to assert their own traits and whimsies. Nevertheless, for a just appreciation of Ibsen it cannot be irrelevant whether the principal character has the full personal sympathy of the author, or whether we discern in this play an undercurrent of self-mockery or even a subtle strain of apology for past attitudes and opinions. At all events, it is clear that the defendant, be his name Stockmann or Ibsen, is bound to lose his case. The justice or injustice of his appeal would matter but little in the end, for a tribunal like that will condemn an idealist on general principles every time, — with or without a hearing. But will the idealist acquiesce in the verdict? He might do so only on the pessimist's ground that if idealism is an out-moded virtue, unesteemed and without practical employment in a world constituted like ours, there is no use burning out one's life in the fight for light and

truth. In such a case, why not exit Ibsen with Stockmann? Why trouble any further about giving people what they do not enjoy nor understand?

Now Ibsen does not stand on the ground of the pessimist and as yet the hopeless thought of deserting his cause does not enter his soul. He takes Stockmann's case under careful review; it certainly has aspects that extenuate the adverse decision. The main question he broaches is this: Why does society ignore the idealist, if not actually turn against him? It would seem the most natural thing for the higher intellect to sway the masses by the irresistible power of a lofty purpose. Then, why is idealism in its aggressive manifestations almost impotent before the elephantine inertia of the public will? Again the glimmer of a suspicion arises that there might be something wrong with idealism itself or at least with some of its methods. In a world that is sick with untruth is it inconceivable that the contagion may have touched the idealist himself? In earlier dramas, we have made acquaintance with individuals like the invertebrate Peer Gynt and the lackadaisical Hilmar Tønnesen, representatives for certain of a far from uncommon pseudo-idealism. And besides the question of intrinsic worth there is yet further matter for doubt. The idealist may hurt a cause from a *trop de zèle* as much as through insincerity: he may undo his own work by an ominous lack of the necessary moderation.

Lastly, the idealist may be working injury to himself and his mission through a temperamental want of discernment and sense of proportion. The general run of people are evidently not willing to listen to his unadulterated gospel. Is it, then, *necessary* or *wise* to tell the full



truth to ordinary men? Stockmann's experience points emphatically to the contrary. And so we see again how with Ibsen one issue invariably begets another, each play supplying the psychological ferment for another play. The erstwhile side-issue, by a no less characteristic shift, is raised in a subsequent treatment to the place of first importance. In this manner *An Enemy of the People* becomes the prerequisite for a full comprehension of Ibsen's next tragedy.

From Stockmann's bitter experience we are led to infer, tentatively, a sad admission from the uncompromising champion of truth, and for ourselves the logical conclusion that we should keep our cherished truths to ourselves and allow our fellow men to guard theirs likewise.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE WILD DUCK

Is Truth indeed a panacea for all the ills that human-kind is heir to, or is it perhaps merely a "pragmatic" entity, without fixed and sempiternal standards? In the latter case, may not that which for some people is an unmitigated lie turn out for others a beneficial truth? That which a man really needs, which fits him for his life, is his truth, declares Dr. Relling in *The Wild Duck* thirty years before Professor William James spread the same assertion over three hundred pages. Relling's claim is that there is no such thing as general truth. "Take away from your average man his life illusion, and you are taking away his happiness at the same stroke,"<sup>1</sup> and the happenings in this drama go far to justify his theory about the "necessary life-supporting lie." Professor James and his co-pragmatists have hardly done much more than to descant more or less interestingly on the theory of far older philosophers. Nietzsche and his inspiritor Stirner, not to go back too far beyond our time, are very explicit on the pragmatic score. Take this bit of reflection from Stirner's *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* : "Truth is dead, a letter, a word, a material which I can use up. All Truth *per se* is dead, a corpse. It is alive only as my tongue is alive, that is to the degree of my own aliveness. Truths are materials like herbs and weeds. Between herb and weed it is for me to

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VIII, p. 372.

decide. . . . Truths are only phrases, forms of expression, words."

The "life-saving lie" need not, therefore, be infused from without, as in the case of the theologian Molvik and his ilk. In *The Master Builder*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, and the *Epilogue* the persons, as has been noticed by George Brandes,<sup>a</sup> are disposed boldly to posit truths in themselves more or less doubtful. Hilda, discussing Solness and Kaja with Ragnar, insists on her reason "why he kept hold of her": "No, but 't is so! It must be so! I want — I want it to be so."<sup>1</sup> Rubek in the *Epilogue* asserts concerning the value of his work: "It shall, shall, shall be valued as a master-work."<sup>2</sup>

*The Wild Duck* ("Vildanden," 1884)<sup>3</sup> is advertised by its title as another dramatic parable. In this piece the inquiry concerning the practical utility of ideal endeavors is continued. The conclusion seems to be negative, since the rule of absolute truthfulness, postulated hitherto as an irremissible condition of moral health, becomes here itself a species of plague. Yet if a cynical denial of idealism were the cheap and easy lesson of this great tragedy-comedy, if *The Wild Duck* had to be read only as a satire on its author's once cherished, now abandoned, theory that Truth and Liberty are our social saviors, then it would amount to a despondent man's declaration of moral bankruptcy, and a proof of his conversion to the bread-and-butter policy of life. Indeed, he would have fallen far below this point, since the "pragmatic" truth em-

<sup>1</sup> Vol. x, p. 343.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. xi, p. 336.

<sup>3</sup> The work was kept up from April to September, 1884. C. p. 384. The Scandinavian *premières* took place in January and February, 1885.

bedded in the surface of this play would redound to the discredit of all the higher illusions, and to the commendation of a general régime of swindle. But how could the poet's prime purpose be to make light of idealism, when idealism vindicates itself so triumphantly in the ultimate event, — when, after first being urged to doubt the value of truthfulness, we are taught by the matchless nobility of a human soul to criticize our own skepticism as severely as we do the beliefs which we have come to doubt? Far juster is it to seek the lesson in the disclosure of certain perilous antinomies which lurk beneath the demands of absolute truth. The theme was struck vigorously before, and in *An Enemy of the People* it was first introduced into the sphere of ordinary life.

Significantly enough, the particular exponent of truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, who in the new play carries the war against deceit into the sanctum of family life, is ostensibly a person of very inferior mental stature as compared with the former apostles of veracity. If already Stockmann's uncompromising and just a bit loud-mouthed rectitude verged here and there on the ridiculous, his imperfect judgment would seem to have foreshadowed the ineffably greater unreasonableness of his successor Gregers Werle. The latter, too, is a victim of his own uprightness; only he stupidly carries virtue to such excess that he forfeits the smallest chance of healthy sympathy. Although he is meant for the principal of the plot, our interest goes out not to him, but to the minor characters. True, the modern drama does not require heroes, but it cannot do without men, and sympathetic men at that. Gregers Werle is in fact what Stockmann

was only in name, an enemy of society, or, in bald prose, a private danger and a public nuisance; a living proof of the lamentable fact that in this queer world of ours a fool, or blockhead, or bigot, or virtuous eccentric, in short, any one with a conscience that is not enlightened and guided by intellect, may do quite as much irremediable mischief as an unscrupulous self-seeker or an astute and self-controlled villain. A monomaniac ceases to be harmless the moment he determines to make people happy against their will by the potent spell of his particular panacea. Now, young Werle's sole and sure antidote against the stale poison of untruthfulness is the quickening virtue of the absolute truth. So far, so well; but Werle's self-conceit magnifies his own two-candle intellect into a powerful arc light that is to dissipate all darkness out of its hidings. As a matter of fact, the officiously persistent dispenser of light is far too incompetent, too cowardly and inert, to put his foot into dangerous places and start an energetic campaign for his ideals, like Stockmann. About Stockmann there was undeniably a poetic halo; Gregers is hopelessly ordinary, a sluggard and bungler by nature, well worthy of Faust's rebuke to Mephisto:—

“Thou canst not compass general ruin,  
And hast on smallest scale begun.”

For he contents himself with burrowing into every suspected corner; he noses for hidden skulls and skeletons in the family closets of his dearest friends; so soon as found they must have the feeble gleam of his intellect shed on them. The quizzical Dr. Relling, who has made a mess of his medical career, yet is at bottom a person of sound



knowledge and some character, diagnoses Gregers's case sharply as acute "Rechtschaffenheitsfieber." It might be translated "acute rectitudinitis." The surest symptom of this disease is a variety of conscience which forbids the patient to keep out of other people's concerns. The victim loses the muscular control, so to speak, over an impulse to speak unpleasant truths to his friends. From the sum total of his qualities Werle's passion for truth emerges as an unconquerable disposition to meddle in the affairs of other folks. This busybody never suspects that the revelation of truth might sometimes be superfluous and even undesirable. Some people hate to have their illusions tampered with; need happiness be ruthlessly destroyed when it is built out of a fancy? Nor does the dangerous meddler have a thought of that other very large class of people who are left by nature and upbringing incapable both of living in dreams and of fulfilling the stern postulates of highest morality: commonplace, material-minded creatures who yet, with all their shortcomings, have their place in the economy of society, and fill it well. Life for such people would be quite tolerable, in the words of Dr. Relling, if they could only get rid of the confounded duns that keep on pestering them in their poverty with the claims of the ideal. An example in the present case is Gina, the wife of Hjalmar Ekdal. Not a bad woman at all, in spite of her lack of grammar and her unsavory past, she acquits herself of all her practical duties to the entire satisfaction of her domestic circle, and is worth half a dozen Hjalmars, even at his professional work. Morally, too, she is far and away his superior. The father of Gregers Werle had her as his mistress before she was married: but

that *liaison* had been forced upon her against her will, by her own mother, and she did not lose her self-respect with her virtue. There is nothing feigned about her indignation when she is treated as though she were not respectable. Actresses who represent her as a superannuated prostitute are poor psychologists. Her motherly and wifely qualities should count for much. Her tender words over little Hedvig's dead body are truly womanly and stand in grateful contrast with the profuse repentance and theatrical self-accusations of Hjalmar, to whom, as Dr. Relling says, little Hedvig, in less than a year's time, will be nothing but a pretty theme for declamation.<sup>1</sup>

It is a fine instance of tragic, or tragi-comic, irony that Gregers is bent on benefiting Hjalmar by causing a rupture with the one person in the world who is equal to the difficult task of keeping him from going utterly to the dogs. Seemingly Ibsen, with his thought forever working up the by-products of former experiments, and seeking to utilize the very sweepings of his workshop, reverts here to a *motif* in *A Doll's House*. When Dr. Relling faces Gregers with the question, "Is it rude to ask what you really want in this house?" the answer is given, "To lay the foundations of a true marriage."<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Linden, in forcing that explanation between Nora and her husband, had a similar thought, but it did not develop, with her, into a mania.

Other figures and ideas in *The Wild Duck* also go back to earlier plays. First to be named is that burly neurasthenic, Hjalmar Ekdal, in whom the admiring Gregers sees a "real, genuine man," and in whose rescue from the "swamp" where he is living Gregers seeks his greatest

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VIII, p. 399.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334.

mission. This utterly hollow phraseologist calls to remembrance that wide-mouthed herald of civic ideals, Stensgaard, although his ambition is directed far less toward social and political prominence; but his lineal ancestor among Ibsen's characters is that neurotic drone Hilmar Tønnesen (*Pillars of Society*). There was, of course, a living model, too; probably a third-rate painter named Magnus Bagge.<sup>1</sup> Without question Hjalmar's mental state should be considered unhealthy. The distinguished neuropathologist Wilhelm Weygandt<sup>2</sup> pronounces the case a "heboid form of *Dementia Præcox*, complicated by a slight paranoiac tendency"; and, by the way, diagnoses in such competent quarters go to show that, whether Ibsen did or did not succeed in reproducing "typical" and clinically accurate cases, he was artist and observer enough to produce consistent and possible cases.

Handicapped as he finds himself for the race of life, Hjalmar Ekdal is evidently pursuing a steady and untroubled course of idleness. His pretended ambition is a huge, transparent lie. He poses as an inventor and claims to be on the eve of a phenomenal success. "Have you heard of my invention, I wonder?" is with him, in all probability, a stock question. But when you ask him about the nature of his invention, he will surely answer you as he answers Gregers: "Oh, my dear fellow, you must not ask for such details yet — that takes time."<sup>3</sup> Childish dreams are his only inventions. A true congener in this regard of Peer Gynt, he is quite contented to loll about, doing nothing, as long as he is fed and admired and satisfied in his petty vanities. Not being aggressively

<sup>1</sup> C, p. 425.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. chapter ix, note g.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. VIII, p. 296.

unscrupulous like Stensgaard, he does not betray his mean and sordid egoism so quickly. He is not without *bon-homie*, in fact quite an amiable good fellow as long as you do not ask him to do any work. His attachment to his family is selfish and superficial. The same man who once refers to himself as a *pater familias* starving for his kin forgets the promise given his little girl to bring her a lot of good things from a dinner party, and consoles her in his large-hearted way with the menu! "Sit down at the table and read the bill of fare, and then I'll describe to you how the dishes taste."<sup>1</sup> His fondness for the child does not prevent him from exploiting her labor. She retouches photographs for him to the certain ruin of her weak eyes. Knowing full well the inevitable result, he salves his conscience by asking her to be careful! The poor girl is going blind, but is she not alone responsible for her misfortune?

Demonstrative and spectacular is Hjalmar Ekdal. For any crisis he has a *grand geste* ready. A deed of gift arrives from Merchant Werle for his ancient scapegoat, old Lieutenant Ekdal, and little Hedvig. The generous provision made for the child, together with the thought that the donor, like the beneficiary, is growing blind, convinces Hjalmar that Werle is Hedvig's real father. With a grand display of wounded pride he tears the document in two. His poor child he repudiates, and almost kills her with insult. Fortunately Hjalmar's sensitiveness is balanced by a great recuperative power. Time at last heals his wounded honor, — but it takes nearly twenty-four hours, — and the haughty cavalier picks up the pieces of the torn paper to paste them humbly together again, with this

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VIII, p. 243.

touching sentiment, "Far be it from me to lay hands upon what is not my own — and least of all upon what belongs to a destitute old man — and to the other as well."<sup>1</sup>

Even his modest hankering for animal comforts is made to certify against the poor uncharacterized wretch. Hedvig offers to fetch his flute in order to assuage his cantankerous temper. Hjalmar sulks in reply, "No, no flute for me; I want no pleasures in this world." Then, pacing about as he whines out his woes, he actually threatens to work, — beginning to-morrow.

You shall see if I don't. You may be sure I shall work as long as my strength holds out.

*Gina.* But, my dear good Ekdal, I did n't mean it in that way.

*Hedvig.* Father, mayn't I bring in a bottle of beer?

*Hjalmar.* No, certainly not. I require nothing, nothing — (*comes to a standstill*). Beer? Was it beer you were talking about?

*Hedvig.* Yes, father; beautiful fresh beer.

*Hjalmar.* Well — since you insist upon it, you may bring in a bottle.<sup>2</sup>

Plainly the way to this man's heart is through his stomach. He returns to his abandoned home just for a little nourishment; and the practical Gina staunchly conquers his dark resolutions and anchors him safely to his fireplace with a trayful of homely viands.<sup>3</sup> In spite of his pleasanter traits our judgment concerning this thoroughly worthless and self-centred character is not kept very long in suspense; and it is greatly to be doubted whether Professor Woerner can convert many students of Ibsen to his opinion that in Hjalmar Ekdal it is after all the lovable characteristics that prevail.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VIII, p. 385.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 378 f.



The elder Werle resembles in character both Consul Bernick and Chamberlain Alving. He combines a record of past libertinage with the ruthless greed of the local man of might. Married twice, both times for material advantages, he did not manage his home life in a manner to instill in a young lad the moral nutriment of domestic happiness. The quickest road to wealth for him was not the straightest. And just as in *Pillars of Society* Johan Tønnesen was made a scapegoat for Bernick's malefactions, so here old Ekdal had to go to prison for the *subiti guadagni* of his highly respectable partner in business. After his release a sop was thrown the broken old man in the shape of a petty clerkship; ruined in body, mind, and reputation, he is part of that human wreckage we constantly encounter in Ibsen — the flotsam and jetsam of vessels grounded on the shoals of life. (Of this class of people Krogstad in the *Pillars of Society*, Brendel in *Rosmersholm*, and Foldal in *John Gabriel Borkman* are classic specimens.)<sup>1</sup> The disgraced old man bears his tragic isolation by the aid of a childish illusion. Preserving in his imagination a recollection of his favorite pleasure, he amuses himself by pretending to hunt game among the toy trees of his attic. Should not Gregers Werle in the holy name of Truth cure the delusion? Dr. Relling, we have seen, thinks otherwise. He, too, is one of life's misfits, possessed like Ulrik Brendel or Eilert Lövborg of a measure of genius, but too unsteady in his habits for the purposes of practical life. Still another social bankrupt must be named, that crapulous theologian, Molvik. Relling calls him the "poor, dear pig," and braces him up

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 217.

with the fiction that he has a "demonic" nature which feeds on alcohol. All these characters are conceived and delineated with a rich sense of humor; but it is not the species of humor that makes human frailty lovable, as it is apt to become under the hands of a Lessing, a Dickens, or a Fritz Reuter; rather it partakes of Molière's corrosive wit, or the critical aloofness of George Meredith.

The figures in this genuine tragi-comedy or, more precisely speaking, como-tragedy, impress us as more or less grotesque deviations from the common averages of life. And in this no exception need be made for the little heroine of the play, inasmuch as her conduct, too, is at wide variance with the temper and actions of the average young girl. To be sure, her abnormality is the veriest opposite of the self-indulgence and weakness of will observable in Hjalmar or Molvik. Altogether a child still in the strength and purity of her affections, yet emotionally upwrought at her critical age, she enacts, in the midst of her commonplace company, the moral dictate as she understands it, with saintly obedience and blind devotion. Gregers's suggestion that she sacrifice her most treasured possession to prove her love for her father is not original, for it smacks of that well-known anecdote in Herodotus about Polycrates and his ring, which Schiller wrought into his famous poem. But innocent little Hedvig accepts the suggestion like a command of holy gospel, and with a tremulous heart makes ready to purchase her father's peace of mind with the sacrifice of the lame wild duck that has been safe from the old gunner because it was her pet; and when she overhears Hjalmar brutally asking the impious question: "If I then asked her: Hedvig, are you

willing to renounce that life for me?" and hears his scornful laugh as he continues, "No, thank you, you would soon hear what answer I should get,"<sup>1</sup> she is stung to the quick and allays his blatant want of faith. In the drama we have no safe means of knowing whether Hedvig's suicide was premeditated; but in the early sketches her resolution is hinted by the threat, "Oh, I am not going to get any older."<sup>2</sup> My opinion is that Hedvig takes her life partly from grief over her father's sudden revulsion from her, but partly from a subconscious wish to save him from the loss of his last moral support. Her self-sacrifice, she feels, — *O sancta simplicitas!* — must revivify his faith in human nature. What a distinct adumbration we have here of the tragedy of Johannes Rosmer and Rebecca West! In the figure of the noble young idealist Ibsen has immortalized his beloved only sister of the like name, his favorite among the family — indeed the only member of it with whom he maintained an enduring intimacy and to whom he felt himself permanently tied by a bond of mutual understanding.<sup>b</sup> He made of little Hedvig Ekdal a pure embodiment of other-love and self-immolation, not unlike that pure virgin in the Golden Legend who would raptly lay down her life for the salvation of a suffering soul. Hedvig is the one real idealist in the drama, for the true test of idealism is under all circumstances the capacity for devotion.

The symbolical name of the play and the symbolism of its external apparel make us look for covert significances. Did Ibsen perhaps mean to point out, since both Gregers and Hedvig end by suicide, that idealism, be it sane or

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VIII, p. 391.

<sup>2</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, p. 241.

crazy, petty or sublime, ends in its own destruction? Or in order to plunge us into the depth of pessimism, did he point morosely to little Hedvig's moral splendor as if to say: "Behold, this is what some of us are like before the ugly mill of life puts us through its dirty grind and inevitably dulls the glitter of our souls"? And did he mean to fix for us the attainable limits of truthfulness and devotion by the concrete example of the marriage of two people "with a past," declining in years and health, namely, the wealthy merchant and his housekeeper? Even if that may have been his purpose at the time, we may trust him at some future opportunity to view the question through another facet, and perhaps he may then succeed in rebuilding his shattered faith and ours. Once grant that there is a constructive idealism at work in our world, and it cannot any longer be alleged with justice that all mankind is bestialized by the uncleanly process of living, and finally sorted off into the two grand divisions, the cud-chewers and the cormorants.

It is far from the poet's thought to preach the contempt of all that can make life lovable. Although *The Wild Duck* is pervaded by sadness, it does not breathe pessimism, and we are not finally dismissed with a note of bitterness, — rather with a consoling strain of puzzling mockery, as if a piece of music were to cease on the dominant seventh unresolved; the final cadence that is withheld, we either must strike ourselves, or wait for the performer to finish.

In discussing the *dramatis personæ* we must not overlook one whom Ibsen left to enact its not inconsequential rôle off the scene, — which is quite the proper place for feathered bipeds, the French creator of barnyard

drama to the contrary notwithstanding. The play of *The Wild Duck* cannot well be reviewed without taking account of the disabled fowl that gives it its name and some of its more recondite meaning. The dramatic importance of the duck is alluded to indirectly in Ibsen's letter to his publisher: "In some ways this new play occupies a position by itself among my dramatic works; in its method it differs in several respects from my former ones. But I shall say no more on this subject at present. I hope that my critics will discover the points alluded to, — they will, at any rate, find several things to squabble about and several things to interpret. I also think that *The Wild Duck* may very probably entice some of our young dramatists into new paths; and this I consider a result to be desired." <sup>1</sup> The poet's hopes and expectations have come true. Hence some attention must be paid by us, in passing, to this new method which Ibsen desired to see imitated by the rising generation of playwrights.

Why is it that this play offers far greater obstacles to a thorough understanding than those that preceded? The reason, it seems to me, is that we are expected to look at things and persons at a distance to which our unaided sight cannot accommodate itself quickly enough; or, perhaps more accurately, that we are asked to bring them into a double focus. At the natural distance their outlines are distinct and definite. The persons seem strictly life-sized, and impress us with the force and truthfulness of their drawing. With the intelligent student they are bound to fare as they did with their creator. He writes: "Long, daily association with the persons in this play has

<sup>1</sup> C, p. 384.



endeared them to me, in spite of their manifold failings; but I am in hopes that they will likewise make good, well-disposed friends among the great reading public and not least among the actor-folk, for all of them, without exception, offer grateful parts. But the study and presentation of these people will not be easy, etc.”<sup>1</sup> Now at the other, the artificial distance, these same men and their conflicts are made to appear to our gaze in a different, and that a thickly obnubilated, perspective. The straining eye is forced to call imagination to its aid in order to combine the illusion of actual life with the illusions of an unreal world; and imagination is the very quality in which minds most differ. The new method to which Ibsen indubitably alludes is that of symbolism. Not the kind which Goethe has in mind in his famous statement that symbolism springs up whenever a poet unconsciously describes the general category in the separate phenomenon (“im Besonderen das Allgemeine schaut”) and conveys both to the reader at one and the same time. We are not speaking of this sort of symbolism, which is unconsciously practiced by every real poet; it is the intentional sort of symbolism — parabolism it might be named — that is in question. It had been a settled feature of Ibsen’s technique before *The Wild Duck*. The esoteric strain was already strongly marked in *An Enemy of the People*. Throughout *Ghosts* the illusionist method was enlisted for the purpose of superinducing a depressing atmosphere and an apprehensive mood; in this endeavor a specific symbolical use was made of natural phenomena, and of the ominous analogy of events, in order to heighten the spir-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *C*, p. 383 f.

itual passions. The leaning towards symbolism announced itself sardonically in the very naming of the plays: *Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*. Yet in *The Wild Duck* and in the later dramas, the esoteric connotation of the entire action becomes for the first time its own aim and purpose, to which the whole apparatus of the play tends to conform. Whereas in those other plays such objects as were already at hand as integral parts of the machinery would be raised to a higher potency of meaning, in *The Wild Duck* the symbolistic requisites are purposely imported into the action. A case in point is the "Titelheldin." Upon the precise significance of the duck I am not foolhardy enough to pronounce. The old poet's malicious prediction is amply realized, and the critics are still squabbling about the meaning of the wounded bird and the concepts crystallized about this famous symbol. Surely some of them must have hit wide of the mark, else their interpretations could not be so contradictory. While one group perceives in the wild duck an analogy to the wing-clipped idealist, Gregers Werle, or a general simile for all lamed enthusiasms of mankind, another regards it as a sort of self-persiflage of Ibsen; a third group finds a resemblance to Ekdal father, a fourth to Ekdal son. The last-named comparison has decidedly something in its favor, since it was drawn by the author in a signal passage of the original sketch, where Gregers is made to say: "Listen, Hjalmar, there's something of the wild duck in you. You were wounded once, and then you dove under, and down there on the bottom you have bitten yourself fast in the sea-grass." <sup>1</sup> Professor Woerner accepts the

<sup>1</sup> *CW*, vol. XIII, p. 333.

crippled duck as a symbolization of the surrogate happiness by which people console themselves after an artificial fashion for their defeat in the contests of life, as when solitary persons shower their love on pet animals; and he declares in all seriousness that in *The Wild Duck* Ibsen was the first to dramatize the curious consolatory office filled by, say, a cat for a lonely old woman, or a dog for a blind man, and by this he discovered a new form of romanticism for the drama! Without gainsaying any of the numerous explanations, I prefer to interpret the wild duck still otherwise, and, as seems to me, more simply. To me the duck is not the incarnation of any other ideas than those conveyed, without it, by the characters in action. It stands for the latter as their descriptive sign; the wounded duck serves as a heraldic animal, so to speak, for the conscious or unconscious misery of this battered company of left-behinds of whom old Ekdal is the typical representative. If this explanation be rejected by symbol-hunters on account of its too great simplicity, we shall be led into a cluster of difficulties by Gregers Werle's would-be philosophical dalliance with this and related similes. For the dog that dives for the bird and brings it to the surface we might accept Gregers's explanation.<sup>1</sup> But his ingenuity cannot satisfy us on the score of certain other things suspected slightly or strongly of a hidden meaning. What might be the deeper significance of the useless old gun which is dismantled and cleaned and put together and taken to pieces again; <sup>2</sup> and why does the "venerable man in the silver locks," as he is dubbed by

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VIII, pp. 268, and 300; *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

his phraseologist of a son, wear traditionally a fox-colored wig? <sup>1</sup> The poet himself arms the hands of the seasoned pursuer of symbols and puts him on the scent, when he makes Gregers suggest to Hedvig that the garret where old Ekdal indulges his sporting propensity might conceivably be identical with the depths of the sea. We read: —

*Hedvig.* It sounds so strange to me when other people speak of the depths of the sea.

*Gregers.* Why so? Tell me why.

*Hedvig.* No, I won't; it's so stupid.

*Gregers.* Oh, no, I am sure it's not, Do tell me why you smiled.

*Hedvig.* Well, this is the reason: whenever I come to realize suddenly — in a flash — what is in there, it always seems to me that the whole room and everything in it should be called "the depths of the sea." But that is so stupid.

*Gregers.* You must n't say that.

*Hedvig.* Oh, yes, for you know it is only a garret.

*Gregers* (*looks fixedly at her*). Are you so sure of that?

*Hedvig* (*astonished*). That it's a garret?

*Gregers.* Are you quite certain of it?

(*Hedvig is silent, and looks at him open-mouthed.*)<sup>2</sup>

Yet this incident may be taken otherwise than as a general warning to the reader to be on the lookout for symbolistic man-traps and spring-guns scattered all over the grounds. For it may be simply a withering bit of characterization, since Gregers is no favorite of Ibsen's; <sup>3</sup> or it may be a shaft of romantic irony directed against Gregers or, for the matter of that, against the fad of hunting for

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VIII, p. 296, also pp. 237 and 271. Cf. on these matters B. Litzmann, *Ibsens Dramen*, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. VIII, p. 289.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

mysteries in every work of art. Ibsen sometimes grew wholly out of patience with the profound exegesis advanced by his admirers. For instance, in the opening scene of *A Doll's House* Nora gives a generous tip to a public messenger who has carried her bundles home for her. This, by certain people, was construed as a proof that Ibsen was a socialist! Occasionally he would say, with reference to some passage in a new play of his: "Well, some commentator or other will come along and tell me what I really meant by that."

Altogether, he might well be impatient with the average quality of reader and playgoer, for somehow the public still failed to realize the special purport and message of his art. He had now reached the perfection of that individual style for which he had been seen to strive so arduously from the beginning of his modern plays. A long experience of the stage in his earlier formative period had yielded to his inborn dramatic genius all the mechanical secrets of his craft. From *Pillars of Society*, produced at the age of forty-nine, he conquered with rapid strides his artistic independence, and along with his own progress moved the modern conception of the form and purpose of the drama.



## CHAPTER XIII

### ROSMERSHOLM

IBSEN was now fifty-six years old, and by nature's unalterable decree had reached the summit of his artistic development. In a dramaturgic respect, *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck* mark the highest level, with this reservation, however, that the first act of *The Wild Duck* is almost superfluous. Ibsen's style, to be sure, underwent modifications and in minor details still further improvement after that; but the excellence of the succeeding plays was marred by a too scrupulous avoidance of the external effect and by a certain diminution of lucidity, which was the result of the fastening hold of the symbolistic method upon his art.

On the other hand, though the ripened art of these master works of stagecraft was never to be surpassed, and indeed the attained level of excellence was gradually lowered through the natural decline of the creative impulse, the spiritual growth of Ibsen was not conterminous with the artistic, and the works that followed registered its further progress. In the course of a lifelong process of self-education some of the extremes of his radicalism were revised or toned down. No longer do we see the revolutionary hurrying with averted glance past the brighter sides of the social spectacle. Also, in these later works a greater hopefulness asserts itself, albeit by indirection. Their philosophy shapes itself to a gentler and serener

disposition towards the extant world, at the same time assuming greater strength and a larger outlook into the future, — partaking even of an unwonted willingness to bridge and conciliate the harsh contrasts that beset our social life; in fine, showing a lessened horror of compromise. The altered disposition, it must be acknowledged, was not wholly due to moral causes. The poet's rigor, to be candid, did not resist the softening effect of the good things of life that were now at last assured to him after being so long withheld: a care-free existence, world-wide celebrity, influence, and a secure leadership with the oncoming generation, such possessions rarely fail to extend the limits of a man's social sympathy. Withal the truest explanation of the change has to be sought in Ibsen's advancing inner soundness.

While peripherically a man's change of principles will always be interpreted as a sign of weakness or temporizing, it may in deepest truth testify to a higher form of courage and loyalty than does the obstinate clinging to old opinions and sentiments. But in Ibsen's case need we speak of inconsistency at all? Let us clearly define his position, in order to arrive at an unprejudiced estimate. From the beginning we have seen that his individualism, to state it in a mild paradox, was only collectivism of an ideal sort. He held that the individual who developed to the utmost his most precious gift, namely, his inner freedom, would eventually be the one of greatest value to society. With Emerson he thought, "The best political economy is the care and culture of men." Ibsen really never sympathized with the coarser conception of individualism pure and simple. His ultimate ideal was a

social ideal: the vision of human society reconstructed on a higher plane by the consensus of individual interests. For, as Herbert Spencer puts it, a necessary relation exists between the structure of a society and the nature of its citizens.<sup>a</sup> For the well-being of individuals, whether as units or in the aggregate, the maintenance of order is paramount. "The ideal of civilization must be perfect anarchy," says one of our college presidents who is not at all notorious for a democratic conduct of his office — "order maintained from within, not order imposed from without"; then wisely puts the brake on his runaway train of thought: "But in the crude civilization of to-day there is no place for anarchy."<sup>b</sup>

Ibsen's philosophy, being a synthesis of individualism and socialism, of need ended not in anarchy, but in a loftier form of aristocracy. He looks forward to a regeneration of the race different from what can be effected by legislation and jurisdiction; to a time when human minds and hearts shall be beyond the necessity of external supervision and control; when the observance of the moral law shall be intuitive rather than mandatory. The difference between this Utopia and that of Nietzsche has been fitly stated by some one in the chiasmic formula that Nietzsche preaches "den Willen zur Macht," Ibsen, "die Macht zum Willen." Undeniably he was at first totally unreserved in championing the individual against a society whose aggregate opinions he bluntly contemned, but almost from his artistic start he emphasized the dangers of eccentric and of false individualism. Against the vagaries of distempered nihilism, against the cormorant rapacity of the egoist he had sounded his earnest warnings. Great

as was his contempt for the canting morality of the common crowd, he execrated even more the erratic world-improver and the self-worship of any seeker after his own exclusive advantage. He had come to realize that in our world "order is even more important than freedom."<sup>c</sup>

The play in which the ripened philosophy of Ibsen became articulate was *Rosmersholm* (1886),<sup>d</sup> considered by many the greatest among Ibsen's later plays. It is also, unquestionably, one of the most difficult to understand. In outer seeming, at least as regards its background, *Rosmersholm* is political. That came as a natural result of the poet's second visit to his native land (in 1885), when, after the recent victory of the Liberals under the leadership of Johan Sverdrup, the whole country was still in the after-throes of the keen and rancorous struggle between the two principal parties. Ibsen was most unpleasantly impressed with what he saw of political doings while at home. As we well know, he despised "practical" politicians and attached to their work little hope for the people's furtherance in enlightened happiness. According to Ibsen himself, one motive of *Rosmersholm* was to call the whole nation to work.<sup>1</sup> In a brief but very characteristic address at a workingmen's meeting at Trondhjem on the fourteenth of June, 1885, he expressed his aspirations for his country in these now almost hackneyed words: "There remains much to be done before we can be said to have attained real liberty. But I fear that our present democracy will not be equal to the task. An element of *nobility* must be introduced into our national life, into our parliament, and into our press. Of course

<sup>1</sup> C, p. 412.

it is not nobility of birth that I am thinking of, nor of money, nor yet of knowledge, nor even of ability and talent. I am thinking of nobility of character, of will, of soul.”<sup>1</sup>

Ibsen prided himself on occupying a position outside and above the political parties. Living as he did away from the seat of dissensions, the maintenance of neutrality between the recognized political persuasions was comparatively easy for him. In his essential tendencies he was and remained a radical. With the Liberals, however, his sincerity of opinion failed to pass unchallenged. They regarded him as a blue-black reactionary, and consequently treated him as their sworn enemy. Not without a show of justification: his aversion to the Liberal Party was strongly grounded in his love of independence; he had a natural dislike for any doctrine that smacked even remotely of socialism. To this dislike a strong æsthetic partiality, an unconquerable *odi profanum*, contributed its share; aristocratic minds are very apt to think of the rank and file as mere “Kanonenfutter” in the war of civilization. Ibsen was never far from the belief that the people are the mob: ignorant, foolish, reckless, and easily led astray by their passions. The crude and vulgar concomitants of democracy appeared to Ibsen as a bad exchange for the evils of government by settled authority. Democracy without these defects seemed an idle dream, and between the two possible extremes of oligarchy and mobocracy he preferred the former. To Brandes he wrote: “The Liberals are the worst enemies of freedom. . . . Freedom of thought and spirit thrives best under abso-

<sup>1</sup> *SNL*, p. 53; cf. also *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, p. 208.



lutism; France showed this, then Germany, and now Russia.”<sup>1</sup> Thus we see one, who by instinct and intellect was something akin to an anarchist, transiently drawn by his finer sensibilities to the support of a moribund and in many respects preposterous political order. By those words addressed to the workmen of Trondhjem he plainly hinted that the experiment of popular self-government could only then be tolerated if the enfranchised mass showed itself capable of rising to higher planes, not only in its civic and material, but also in its private and spiritual existence. Without that, democracy could not but prove a bane and a blight to the finer gains of civilization, and there would be truth and justice in the charge made by that arch-tory, Rector Kroll: “For my part, it seems to me we are all in a fair way to be dragged down into the mire, where hitherto only the mob have been able to thrive.”<sup>2</sup>

No doubt Ibsen’s political profession of faith is promulgated in *Rosmersholm*, yet the political movement in this drama, being neither novel nor profound, has no great and independent importance of its own; it merely helps to set off Ibsen’s social ideal which in the other plays reveals itself negatively, through analysis, and is here positively revealed through logical tendencies. So Johannes Rosmer, like Thomas Stockmann, is closely identified with Ibsen’s inmost thoughts and feelings. Of course the identity should be sought not in any outer coincidence of deed or circumstance but in his inward experiences. As for the factual basis of the play, that was furnished by a

<sup>1</sup> *C*, p. 233; cf. also vol. VIII, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. IX, p. 41; cf. also *C*, p. 351.

scandal in Swedish high life. A prominent diplomatist who later became a close friend of Ibsen's fell deeply in love with his own cousin. He being a married man, the outraged moral sense of the gossips and the newspapers took care to denounce him to the wife. The lovers left the country, not long after which the deserted wife died; the physicians named pulmonary consumption as the cause of her death, but the *post-mortem* of public opinion was that the countess died of a broken heart. The blame for her death was laid on the surviving husband and his second wife.

The story is repeated here in its dull matter-of-factness merely to demonstrate that no matter where the incidents of a drama may come from, its dynamic effect is mainly due to the *rationale* that is supplied by the poet. The transformation of raw material into a great drama involves structural alterations which a master alone can make. The art of weaving from the coarse stuff of banal news items the fabric of an immortal tragedy is one of the undivulged secrets of genius. It may well be believed that there is some effective difference between the imagination of a poet and that of a reporter.

*Rosmersholm*, despite its outward political and sociological bearings, is at bottom a private tragedy: two completely differentiated individuals are dramatically nerved to a decisive struggle in a common crisis of their fates. The last stages of an inexorable course of destiny are shown, yet the issue depends on no outer circumstances. It is determined wholly by the mutual reactions of the two characters.

Again a woman with a powerful will stands in the heat

of the battle between the conjunctive and disjunctive tendencies of the mind. Ibsen was of the belief that women are more apt to differentiate themselves from gregarious standards than men, because of their greater social detachedness under our economic state, although numerous agencies inhibit the feminine instinct for self-maintenance and much of it is wasted through atrophy. Now in *Rosmersholm* we have a heroine whose will power is strong enough to have set her nature entirely off from her social environment. In freedom from moral prepossessions she resembles the mother of Oswald Alving; but she is immeasurably separated from her by her upbringing and the vampirism of her nature. Rebecca Gamvick was formed into a freethinker and radical by Dr. West, a man of massive intellectual force, but almost inconceivably bestial, wholly destitute of moral sense, and governing his conduct solely in response to his animal cravings. That this man, who corrupted her in every sense of the word, was her own father, Rebecca learns at a late stage of the action. Rebecca, like her father, is vigorous and able, but also depraved. At least her moral sense is "above" making any distinctions between the good and the evil, and self-interest is the only test of her faith and doctrine. One hesitates to repeat again that much overworked term "Übermensch" which Goethe and Nietzsche stamped each with such a different value, yet no equally fitting designation occurs for her sovereign egotism that overleaps all accepted moral barriers. The character of this Rebecca, with her intellectual grip, uncanny perspicacity, and fierce instinct for self-preservation and tenacity of selfish purpose, recalls in some ways her namesake in

Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*; but her egoism transcends that of Becky Sharp in kind as well as in degree. She is a demon in human shape both by right of descent and through the cast of an experience so monstrous as to stagger the belief; and her ferocious passion enters into league with all the wiles and blandishments of womanhood to give her whatever she wills, no matter whether it is some object of material comfort or the winning of a human soul at the cost of a life or two.

Such at least was her state of mind when, after an agitated past, she found a timely haven of rest in the home of Johannes Rosmer. Here at once the master of the house becomes the object of her violent desires, she makes up her mind to have him, and coolly decrees the death of the wife from whom he has already drifted apart. Beate, a commonplace and sickly person, is methodically tortured to death by the cumulative force of hypnotic suggestion; she is made to think that she stands in the way of Rosmer's happiness; Rebecca even pretends to be Rosmer's mistress and makes Beate believe that the ancient name is threatened with disgrace. Beate feels she must put herself out of the way for the good of Johannes and the family name. She writes to the editor of the radical paper, entreating him not to put credence in any evil rumors about her husband's treatment of her. Then she commits suicide. The true reason is guessed by everybody except the widower, who in his complete blamelessness believes that Beate's act was due to mental derangement. If at any time he was enamoured of the adventuress, he has never realized or even suspected it.

Now over against the immoralism of the unchained

instincts of the proletarian there stands embodied in the figure of Johannes what he terms "the instinct of morality"; the inherited nobleness of the natural temper, combined with a careful education and the discipline of the clerical profession. However, the effect of heredity and environment upon Johannes shows also in his limitations. Conservatively predisposed by his birth and religious calling, this true idealist is unfortunately too sensitive, too sad and lethargic, too spiritually-minded, in fine, not robust enough to make a successful man of action. He knows and admits his lack of energy, complaining that it is not his destiny to participate in the strenuous struggles of life.<sup>1</sup> Rebecca establishes an absolute mastery over the self-tormenting recluse. Prompted by her selfish ambition, she succeeds in firing him with a sense of duty to the common life. Gradually his conservative mind is converted to her radical ways of thinking. Interesting in this connection is the exchange of opinion on a new book between Johannes and Rebecca in an early sketch of Act I. The book in question cannot be any other than Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*. There is little doubt, by the way, about Ibsen having shared the views of that great economist on the subject of taxation. In that sketch of *Rosmersholm* Hetman (= Brendel) is a fiery apostle of the single tax. "I only wished to state that we all agree on this: that air and water of our planet are the common property of all. But when it's a question of the solid earth, of the ground under our feet which nobody can do without, ah, *c'est autre chose*! No one dares say *boo* to it that the land of our globe is in the hands of a relatively

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ix, pp. 21-22; cf. also *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, pp. 276 and 278.



small band of robbers who have been exploiting it for centuries."<sup>1</sup>

Now in the fancy-haunted, melancholy peace of Rosmersholm a wonderful change has come over Rebecca. As Rosmer's will and spirit have been set free by her, so in return her savage individualism has been touched and exalted by the association with Rosmer. As by a miracle, the glow that she has kindled radiates back upon her, and by its light her being becomes again clean and luminous. Before his serene spirituality, too, her reckless sensuality is tranquilized. An ideal comradeship binds their two souls closely together. They stand in the relation of helpmeets, and a marriage between them would come near realizing Ibsen's ideal of what marriage should be. Rebecca feels this taming of her savage instincts as a moral boon, yet at the same time as an irretrievable loss, for she knows that the power of her will for lawless self-assertion, and with it her joy in living, is now hopelessly broken. She confesses to Rosmer: —

It was love that was born in me. The great self-denying love that is content with life as we two have lived it together . . .

*Rosmer.* How do you account for what has happened to you?

*Rebecca.* It is the Rosmer view of life — or your view of life at any rate — that has infected my will.

*Rosmer.* Infected?

*Rebecca.* And made it sick, enslaved it to laws that had no power over me before. You — life with you — has ennobled my mind.<sup>2</sup>

We foresee that in the clash between social and excessively individualistic ideals the higher social code will this

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, pp. 310-11.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. IX, p. 146.

time come off triumphant — mainly because its representative is here chosen from a sphere widely removed from the dull and ignoble generality. Nevertheless the central figure of the play is not Johannes, but Rebecca; she occupies that place by the obvious evolution of her moral nature. The arrival at the goal of her desires and ambitions brings to Rebecca a tragical mixture of defeat and victory, since that supreme moment when Rosmer asks her to be his wife finds her inwardly altered and morally risen far above her former self. She refuses to marry him. For her humanized conscience the path to a union with Rosmer is forever blocked by the spectre of her victim. The vital truth has entered her soul, the truth which Rosmer would implant in the coming generation of happy and noble men, that innocence alone is the source of peace and happiness. He blames himself now for Beate's death, and only Rebecca can restore him to the self-confidence that comes of an innocent conscience. She confesses all, revealing every motive, but to Rosmer alone. It is significant how her ennoblement contradicts Rosmer's disbelief in the practicability of his ideals. When she reminds him of his abandoned principles, he answers dejectedly: "Oh, don't remind me of that, it was a vulgar abortive dream, Rebecca, an immature idea which I myself no longer believe. Oh, no, we cannot be ennobled from without, Rebecca."<sup>1</sup>

And now, remembering that Rosmer's faith in the educability of mankind up to his aristocratic ideals has been so greatly weakened by experience with man's worse nature, we understand how in his soul's tumult over the

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ix, p. 148.

final disclosure of Rebecca's secret all his faith in his ideals is shattered. Rosmer shows himself a weakling. His convictions are too flimsy to offer resistance to the first assaults of experience; showing they were not really his own, but borrowed from the far stronger Rebecca. Even before that he had reached the pessimistic conviction that it is practically impossible to diffuse a new energy through retarded and immature consciences and intellects. "They have made it clear to me that the work of ennobling the minds of men is not for me. And besides, it is hopeless in itself, Rebecca; I shall let it alone."<sup>1</sup> Such is the end of his dream of raising men to a higher type of self-consciousness, a dream he shared with Dr. Stockmann, — and with Friedrich Nietzsche. But when his hope and confidence in human nature has thus suffered a total shipwreck, then his pessimism is rebuked and conquered by an incontrovertible proof that ennoblement by precept and example is a possible thing and that his own character has demonstrated that power. That miracle for which Nora Helmer longed in vain happens here again, as it happened when little Hedvig Ekdal by her death disproved her father's shallow misanthropy. But whereas Hedvig made the sacrifice unreflectingly, on the impulse of a moment, it is here offered up with deliberate thought in the full consciousness of ripe reasoning. Rebecca West is ready to die so that Johannes Rosmer may be cured of despair and recapture his faith in men, in his mission, in himself. For if he has made one human soul capable of such sacrifice, he cannot doubt his power to ennoble men. The idea from *The Wild Duck* is now amplified.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ix, p. 139.

As there, so here the death-warrant is pronounced by the most beloved being, this time not casually or impulsively, but advisedly, with mature judgment. The test of faith is sacrifice.<sup>1</sup> The "ideal demand" is actualized in *Rosmersholm*; no surrogate happiness is accepted by such as Rebecca and Rosmer. Rosmer cannot believe in Rebecca's sincerity, nor in the nobleness of human beings, nor in the practicability of any of his ideals, unless Rebecca render proof absolute of their potential existence.

*Rosmer.* Have you the courage, have you the will, — for my sake, — to-night, — gladly, — to go the same way that Beate went? . . . Yes; Rebecca, that is the question that will forever haunt me — when you are gone. Every hour in the day it will return upon me. Oh, I seem to see you before my very eyes. You are standing out on the footbridge — right in the middle. Now you are bending forward over the railing — drawn dizzily downwards, downwards towards the rushing water! No — you recoil. You have not the heart to do what she dared.

*Rebecca.* But if I had the heart to do it? And the will to do it gladly? What then?

*Rosmer.* I should have to believe you then. I should recover my faith in my mission. Faith in my power to ennoble human souls. Faith in the human soul's power to attain nobility.<sup>2</sup>

Rebecca, like Hedvig, is ready for the supreme test. She slowly takes up her shawl and puts it over her head; then she says with composure: "You shall have your faith again."

Socially speaking, there can be no warrant for Rosmer to exact and actually accept so heroic a proof of devotion,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, p. 326.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. IX, p. 159. Cf. *Little Eyolf*, *CW*, XI, p. 97.

This will ever be felt as an ethical weakness of the play. That he is willing to share death with her is not enough for our feelings. For the solution of the tragedy, however, his conduct is more satisfying under a psychological analysis than any other imaginable ending of the drama would be. Rebecca has destroyed his faith in himself, and in his mission. She alone can return that faith to him, and she must do it by deed, not words. A mere separation of Johannes and Rebecca is as much out of the question as their marriage would be. It goes without saying that Rosmer shares the judgment he pronounces over Rebecca. The stern resolve of death sets a seal of solemnity on their indissoluble union. "The husband shall go with his wife, as the wife with her husband. . . . For now we two are one."<sup>1</sup> Judged by their own tests and Ibsen's, Rosmer and Rebecca die in the faith idealistic. But what of the future of their ideals? To whom does the future belong? After the untoward fate of Dr. Stockmann, with the unreadiness of the generality of men for a loftier existence demonstrated there as in *The Wild Duck*, Ibsen in *Rosmersholm* begins to look away permanently from an earlier goal of endeavor. The psychological analysis of individual character becomes his almost exclusive object. The throng has crowded itself wholly out of his interest. Ibsen's plays may fitly be divided into three groups, — plays dealing with the past, plays dealing with the present, and finally those relating to the future. *Rosmersholm* closes the second of those cycles, while connecting it at the same time with the third and final set of dramas, in which the individual enjoys the poet's exclusive consid-

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ix, p. 163.



eration. It belongs, therefore, to a mixed *genre*, partaking as it does both of the social and the purely individual problems. Ibsen's one hope, now to bring it once more to remembrance, is to improve humanity from within through the growth and improvement of the ideal nature in the individual. But from the inner argument of *Rosmersholm* it would proceed that the price of ennoblement is the personal happiness. The spirit of the Rosmers ennobles, says Rebecca, — but it kills happiness.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the fact of Rosmer's going to his death with his work and longings unachieved would seem to bespeak, apart from the unfitness of the particular agent, a measure of hopelessness for the cause itself, and it is a fact that Ibsen entertains no exorbitant hope with reference to the immediate future. Our present civilization moves in channels of material progress, and there is unfortunately no reasonable denying the sad truth that ideals are something of a hindrance in the quest of power, wealth, and influence. Says that ill-regulated genius, Ulrik Brendel: —

Peter Mortensgaard has the secret of omnipotence. He can do whatever he will.

*Rosmer.* Oh, don't believe that.

*Brendel.* Yes, my boy! For Peter Mortensgaard never wills more than he can do. Peter Mortensgaard is capable of living his life without ideals. And that, — do you see, — that is just the mighty secret of action and of victory. It's the sum of the whole world's wisdom. Basta!<sup>2</sup>

*Rosmersholm* is probably the most subtle of all of Ibsen's psychological syntheses of character. Loud colors

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ix, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

and disturbing sounds are carefully avoided; it is like a picture in pastel notes or the soft music of muted strings. Again, as in *Ghosts*, the atmosphere is pregnant with a gloom that nerves the beholder to a tense expectancy of sorrow. The symbolistic method takes a deeper root. A free though not indiscreet use is made of "Stimmungsmittel." The children of Rosmersholm do not cry when they are young, nor ever laugh as they grow older. A death in the family is foreboded by the reappearance of the spectral horses. Behind the objects lurk mysteries, behind indifferent remarks lie deeper meanings. Already we perceive a touch of that infatuation with things occult which becomes so characteristic of Ibsen's artistry in its final stage. Henceforward also the potency of unknown mental influences is brought prominently into the structure of the dramas.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE LADY FROM THE SEA

ALL these features are still more markedly present in *The Lady from the Sea* ("Fruen fra Havet," 1888).<sup>a</sup> With this drama Ibsen's creative work enters upon its third and final phase. When on Ibsen's seventieth birthday his publisher presented the world with the complete edition of his works, the poet accompanied the gift with the admonition that these works should be treated as a coherent entirety — otherwise the reader could not gain a correct impression of the single parts. And certainly we have observed in our study of the plays to this point that, taken in their totality, they present an unbroken progress and clarification of ideas. Ibsen fared, and all true poets do, like Goethe, who said to Eckermann (December 6, 1829): "It is with me as with one who in his youth has a great quantity of small silver and copper money which in the course of his life he exchanges for more valuable coin, so that at the last he sees his early possessions in the form of pure golden coin." The connective continuity of any two successive plays is perfectly plain to him who knows how to look for their inner meaning. Similar human problems are treated under altered objective, likewise under altered subjective, aspects; that is to say, a familiar problem reappears in the guise of a new environment, and is viewed each time through a more enriched and matured philosophy. Consequently, the primary figures of the plays are

closely allied in some of their essential traits. The poet seems to be experimenting with a character by sending him forth successively into greatly differing sets of circumstances. Yet we are not merely to see various sides of one and the same personality, or one and the same side under different lights and aspects; for we witness simultaneously the extraordinary fertility of a poet's creative imagination. Ibsen is extremely rich in ideas, and also very facile in the invention of human characters to convey them. So his figures are much like reincarnations, each increased over its predecessors in moral stature, width of grasp, and beauty of significance. It may be truly said of them, in respect of their ethical import, that they rise to better things on stepping-stones of their dead selves. Ibsen's procedure reminds us of Adolf Wilbrandt's mystical drama, *Der Meister von Palmyra*, in the several acts of which the principal character returns in a sequence of genealogical reincarnations. Nevertheless, the plots and the people are quite distinct. They differentiate themselves spontaneously, inasmuch as each problem treated begets another problem. In this way Ibsen's dramas, taken as a whole, read like a fairly exhaustive case-book of modern social conditions and relations.

While, thus, in intellectual content the dramas of Ibsen's final period are superior if anything to his earlier works, and still more poetical, — in that they possess more of a subtle quality of suggestion, — it must be confessed that from this point on the dramatic imagery grows more unsubstantial; at times the figures are almost shadowy, and rarely do they stand out with the plastic sharpness of outline to which we were formerly accustomed. Possibly,

a further refinement has also taken place in the language, especially through the most cunning balance between word and epithet, but herein, too, a certain loss has to be registered; the speech has lost some of its wonderful naturalness and now and then is almost mannerized.

For the leading part in *The Lady from the Sea*, Ibsen had two models in mind: Camilla Collett and the step-mother of his wife, the well-known authoress, Anna Magdalena Thoresen.<sup>b</sup> Ellida Wangel is a young woman full of an aimless and unbridled yearning. Over her imagination a romantic lure exerts its strange power. The dangers and mysteries of the unknown, the far-away, preoccupy her adventurous spirit. Thus in this drama the lure of the mystical occurs as a tragic strain much as in the earlier parts of Franz Grillparzer's great trilogy, *Das Goldene Vlies*. Ellida's is a nature outwardly lethargic, inwardly quivering with perpetual unrest, a nature torn away from its anchors by deep and violent perturbations. Her existence is overcast by a thick cloud of melancholia, which hides from her the pleasures and obligations of daily life. She has no appreciation for the blessings of a home, and no understanding of her appointed duties in it. Husband and children are neglected. Even the routine of housekeeping is left to one of the two step-daughters.<sup>c</sup> It is a house threatened with disruption by her inexcusable indifference. The "mermaid," as she calls herself, cannot be happy or make others happy, because she is out of her element. The painter Ballested is inspired by her fate and behavior to represent her as a mermaid dying in a sultry cove. She is a stranger to the village on the fjord, coming from a country where, as



Dr. Wangel picturesquely declares, there is flow and ebb in the souls of the people. Her usefulness is wholly submerged in overwrought fancies, in dreams of a romantic and altogether impalpable existence. It would not be a difficult matter to find several obvious resemblances between Ellida Wangel and Rebecca West. Even the figurative name "mermaid" is once applied to the latter by that old castaway, Ulrik Brendel. And a parallel might also be drawn between Ellida and Nora, or between the former and Dina Dorf.<sup>d</sup> But it seems to me that our more truly relevant task is an independent comprehension of Ellida's character in her own situation. This situation involves some past guilt of Ellida, for without an assumption of some sort of tragic blame the dramatic transaction would not be much better than a ghost story. Briefly stated, Ellida's crime is that she has been untrue to herself by contracting a marriage of reason. The old favorite problem of Ibsen, the marriage question, is stirred up again; after the fashion of nearly all the French dramatists of his century Ibsen dealt as a rule with love problems only as they present themselves in the lives of married people. For her unhappiness Ellida blames herself no less than her husband.

*Ellida.* The truth — the sheer, unvarnished truth is this: You came out there and — bought me.

*Wangel.* Bought — did you say — bought?

*Ellida.* Oh, I was not a bit better than you. I joined in the bargain. I went and sold myself to you.<sup>1</sup>

The marriage was an out-and-out "Versorgungsheirat," as the Germans say. And on his part it was also largely

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ix, pp. 299-300.

an act of practical calculation; the widower, unable to bear the void in his home, had looked deliberately about for some one to be a mother to his children. "I see that the life we two lead with each other," says Ellida, "is really no marriage at all."<sup>1</sup> We may rightly speak of guilt in her case, inasmuch as she did not enter into marriage ignorantly, as did Nora, or even reluctantly, as Helen Alving may be presumed to have done. Ellida has sinned against a sacrament. She married without offering love, and without claiming it. Her penance is like that of an earlier heroine of Ibsen.

"For me is life but a long black night,  
Nor sun nor star for me shines bright,  
I have sold my youth and my liberty,  
And none from my bargain can set me free."<sup>2</sup>

At first we are apt to overestimate Ellida, or at least to side with her in the struggle with Wangel; hers seems the larger, more freedom-loving nature beside his outwardly cramped existence. But our respect for the plain country doctor both as a man and a physician increases an hundredfold as we see him rise to the height of self-abnegation. Seeing through her neuropathic state, he cures her through heightening her own sense of responsibility. This he does by putting into her own hands the free choice to stay or to follow the Stranger to whom she feels herself bound by a previous vow. By this generous act on the part of Wangel the crisis is averted and the entire situation changed. Her phantom pursuer desists as soon as she opposes the force of her own will to his. At first she

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ix, p. 302.

<sup>2</sup> Margot, in *The Feast at Solhaug*; vol. i, p. 225.

feels irresistibly recaptured by the old obsession, and seems bound against her will to follow the Stranger by whom she is in equal measure attracted and repelled. Just the same she declines her husband's help and protection, for her choice must be free, nobody can help her but herself.<sup>1</sup> When at last, uninfluenced by her husband, who leaves her free to choose, she decides to stay with him, the Stranger accepts the decision calmly and leaves for good.

Has the Lady from the Sea lost her love of liberty, or has she not rather conceived a new idea of freedom? Before now, liberty meant to her the possibility for boundless self-assertion. At the turning-point in her fate it assumed the meaning of personal responsibility. Freedom consists, for a ripened personality, primarily in the right of overcoming one's egotism by one's moral sense. All men may share in the privilege of conquering the lower by the higher nature; it is an opportunity that remains even to those who reject the belief in the freedom of will. Our best chance of happiness lies in harmonizing our lives with the restrictive laws of society so far as these are reasonable. Our freedom is not lost when we surrender it voluntarily, with full moral consent. "*Nous serons heureux, parce que nous aura plu d'être ce que nous sommes.*"<sup>e</sup> The instant that Ellida assumes her freedom of choice and action she is rid forever of her pursuer; no longer is she overshadowed by that vaguely yearning discontent, but takes her stand in solid reality, feeling herself competent and willing to undertake her duties as a wife and mother. The enjoyment of her very life depended on her knowing

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ix, pp. 308 and 317.

that it is a life for herself to govern and direct; but that right assured to her, she lives no longer for her own selfish pleasure, but with a constant care for others.

Although the central idea of *The Lady from the Sea* is transparent enough, yet the clarity of this psychologically so interesting work is somewhat impaired by the spirit of abstraction that trespasses on the concrete premises of the drama, a further complication being caused by the commixture of heterogeneous symbolical assumptions. The symbolism is thereby rendered too intricate and too wavering in its logic, and a phantasmagoric tone is given to the veriest realities. The trouble lies in the poet's willful play with his fancies, or, perhaps better, in his surrender to their caprices. It has been pointed out<sup>1</sup> that not only is the symbolical meaning of events and ideas differently understood by the various persons involved in the action, but even one and the same person comprehends the same symbols quite differently on different occasions. These discrepancies lead to confusion, since, in order to grasp all the ideas of the play, we should first have to puzzle them out. Ellida, for instance, is nicknamed the Lady from the Sea, in allusion to her yearning for the ocean, — a feeling, by the way, which Ibsen shared keenly throughout his life. In her new place of abode she never gets over a sense of intolerable restraint. She misses the limitless expanse of the water view she had from the paternal lighthouse. Her daily dip in the fjord is like the sole touch of home to her; but here the water is different, it makes her melancholy and nervous. Ellida is not "acclimatized," to use the painter Ballested's favorite phrase. But the sobriquet has also a deeper meaning.

Ellida is called the Lady from the Sea, as though the sea were her natural life element, as though in some inexplicable fashion she partook of the nature of creatures that live in the sea. Ibsen herein made Ellida's nostalgia for the sea the poetical expression of a half-jesting biogenetic superstition. It is assumed by zoölogists that the earliest vertebrate ancestor of man was an ichthyomorphous animal. In Haeckel's *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* mention is made of the Lancelet (*Amphioxus lanceolatus*) as a surviving representative of the lowest vertebrates. Ibsen's remarks anent a "primal link" in the evolutionary chain refer to this animal.<sup>1</sup> He feels that in some people there survives an undercurrent of atavistic memory of this extremely remote lineal kinship.

There exist some interesting paralipomena from the preparatory work for the play.

Has the progress of the human race taken a wrong direction? Why do we belong to the dry land? Why not to the air or the sea? The desire to possess wings; the strange dreams in which we imagine that we can fly and are flying without wondering about it.—What do these things mean? . . . We must conquer the sea; must build floating cities upon the ocean and let them take us from north to south or in the opposite direction with the change of the seasons; must learn to master the winds and the weather. This good fortune will come. And [how unlucky are we] not to live to see it!—The mysterious attraction of the sea. Homesickness for the sea. Persons that are related to the sea. Sea-bound: dependent upon the sea; drawn back to it. . . . A species of fish represents an early link in the evolution [of mammals]. Are there traces (rudiments) of it still left in the human soul—at least in certain human souls? . . . The sea

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, pp. 328–29. Cf. also Haeckel, *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 10th edition, pp. 611–12 and 728.



commands a power of moods that rules us like a dominating will. The sea can hypnotize us; so can nature in general. The great mystery is man's dependence upon blind forces.<sup>1</sup>

In the play itself Ellida is incredulous about mankind having been destined to live on the dry land.<sup>2</sup> She is congenitally in love with the ocean, fascinated by its boundless magnitude and demonic energy in which she senses a quintessential expression of the strenuous forces of life. This character of the sea is externalized in her former lover, the Stranger, who exercises such hypnotic power over her. Of course, the Stranger is not a mere allegory but a breathing human being; but by his moods, habits, character, calling, even by his appearance, he personifies that vast, savage, elemental allurements. Viewed as a human character, he is a totally "declimatized" personality, unknown by name, with a mysterious past. He signs himself by the common cognomen of Johnston; but that is fictitious; to Ellida he gave his name as Freeman. He dwells outside of the society and the laws of men. Once he slew a man, his own captain at that, yet his conscience is clear, for it was a deed of justice. He is never without a loaded revolver, because death for him would be easier to accept than any restraint of his liberty. Ellida's marriage he ignores, since no formal contract can affect his ways. With a plain hint of this anarchistic disposition Ibsen makes him come and go by a leap over the garden fence in disregard of the convenient gate. As the open ocean serves to symbolize the ego unrestrained, so the inland, on the other hand, and the fjord, signify the confinements of society. Whereas out on the main the

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. IX, p. 254.

passions rule and rage, laws and duties and renunciations hem in the self-expression of human nature in any state of civilization.

"That man is like the sea," remarks Ellida, at the conclusion of Act III. In striving to achieve the anthropomorphosis of the sea, the material reality of the Stranger is at times put greatly in jeopardy. Now on this already far from simple symbolism another is superimposed. If the Stranger is the incarnation of the sea, — the sea, understood either as a simile of the resistless sweep of life's blind forces over the individual will or as a simile of the natural impulses in their antagonism to the social agreements, — then the Stranger, as the symbol of a symbol, yet performs symbolic ceremonies on his own account in his function as a concrete personality: he and Ellida have both wedded themselves to the sea, by throwing their rings into it, — the statement comes almost like a warning not to identify the Stranger too closely with the element. But if he does not represent the irresistible fascination the sea has for Ellida, who then is he, and what does he represent? We look bewildered for a definite answer that would stand the test of so much contending evidence. The fact that Ibsen used a "model" for the Stranger — he had heard in Molde the story of a seaman who by the magic of his eye had seduced a minister's wife — helps us not at all. In a letter to Julius Hoffory, Ibsen stated the history of the Stranger in detail and described his apparel. But he added: "Nobody should know what he is, just as little should anybody know who he is or what he is really called." <sup>1</sup> Ibsen has succeeded admirably in

<sup>1</sup> *SNL*, p. 112.

his mystification, for of a certainty the Stranger is drenched in deepest mystery. Ultimately we have to resign ourselves to the thought that it is all a dream, and are only puzzled to know who does the dreaming: Ellida? Ibsen? or you and I? Symbolism approaches here close to the lawless logic of the "Märchendrama" (fairy tale play).

Once it looks as though the poet were resolved to enlighten us. Dr. Wangel, in the last act, furnishes an explanation: —

I begin to understand you by degrees. You think and conceive in images — in visible pictures. Your longing and yearning for the sea — the fascination that he — the Stranger — possessed for you, must have been the expression of an awakening and growing need for freedom within you — nothing else.<sup>1</sup>

This sounds like a terse, clear-cut definition from incontrovertible authority. Yet it does not altogether comport with all features of the action. Also, the "nothing else" at the end makes the definition less satisfying than otherwise it might be. It sounds too much like a caution, "Thus far you may venture, but no farther." We are warned off the private preserves of the poet. And so we are dismissed here — and in the other symbolistic dramas — in a manner that gives us a certain sense of aggravation, a resentment at our being deemed unworthy of the poet's entire confidence; and we part from the play with a measure of diffidence in our ability to spell aright his full meaning. Is not that definition a mere sop to our intellectual curiosity? As one critic puts it drastically, "you have to pick up each and every word and fact like a stone to see what lies hid-

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ix, p. 346.

den underneath.”<sup>g</sup> These things combine to detract both from the clarity of the play and from its artistic authenticity. *The Lady from the Sea* impresses us as a very remarkable and beautiful construction, but not as a spontaneous artistic creation.

It must be conceded, however, that the uncertainties and improbabilities and romantic vaguenesses, while diminishing its dramatic worth, add to *The Lady from the Sea* a fresh element of intense poetical interest. It is by design that the action moves on the border line between the commonplace and the preternatural. The incertitude of the beholder results in his greatly heightened suspense. In this general impression of weirdness, as well as in the particular technical contrivances whereby the impression is conveyed, the work bears a striking resemblance to the dramas of Maurice Maeterlinck.

With these parabolic dramas of Ibsen it is much more difficult to deal in an analytic fashion than was the case with the satirical plays. A hard-and-fast prosaic explanation, even were it safe to give, would be injurious to their subtler poetic fibre. For in their “succinct and intricate type of structure detail ceases to be detail, and the ties of sense and logic are merged into the fine, impalpable web of symbol.”<sup>h</sup>

All the same, Ibsen does not belie, even in these dramas, his old passion for straightforward earnestness of statement. As a rule the ideas or lessons are therefore palpable enough under their veilings. The “idea” or “lesson” in *The Lady from the Sea* is a positive restatement of Ibsen’s old thesis that a true marriage is not the work of priest or judge, and that its only guaranty lies in the willing mutual

surrender of two independently yet harmoniously developed personalities. The play, so to put it, is a pendant to *A Doll's House*. The miracle that Nora expected in vain is here fulfilled. Summarizing the dialectic of *The Lady from the Sea*, we may point once more to the marriage of the principals as a contract that is flimsy and momentarily in danger of annulment until it becomes firm and solid through the infusion of individualism in its double aspect of freedom and obligation. And yet the happy ending is not convincing. The conjugal happiness of the principals remains rather problematical. Since Ellida's yearning was not reasoned but temperamental, is it not likely that sooner or later it may come over her again? Perhaps Ibsen himself did not imagine a cloudless future for the unequal union. For when the younger daughter, Hilda, reappears on the stage in *The Master Builder*, she speaks of having lived not in a real home but in a cage.<sup>1</sup> Is not this possibly a passing allusion to the sequel?

On the question of the merits of *The Lady from the Sea*, critical opinion differs. As a stage play it has been less popular than most of Ibsen's dramas. For this lack of public enthusiasm the several flaws in the technique may be partly to blame. The treatment is somewhat too broad, and the by-plot (Boletta-Arnholm) occupies too much time and space in proportion to its intrinsic interest. The union of the younger couple is too much like a repetition of the conventional marriage of Ellida to Dr. Wangel. The modern public does not relish such improbabilities as the adventurous encounter between the Stranger

<sup>1</sup> Vol. x, p. 333.



and the sculptor Lyngstrand of which the latter tells, or the curious conduct of the Stranger before Ellida, so long as he is meant for a being of flesh and blood and not for a mere phantasmagory, a sort of Flying Dutchman. If, on the other hand, he is to be thought of as a supernatural being, how can the intended effect of unearthliness be produced by a creature in a tweed business suit and peaked traveling cap?

The total absence of social satire also told against the play, since people felt that Ibsen had built up his reputation on that and were loath to miss it. In fact the works of this final period are felt by some critics to undo the earlier efforts mainly because of their freedom from satiric intention. Ibsen was accused of having turned violently anti-Ibsenite. All in all, there was a widespread feeling among friends and foes alike, that Ibsen's power in this play showed itself as being on the wane.

The preoccupation with cryptic phenomena, which, as has been shown, decreases the vitality of the enacted characters, deserves a special comment. The first sign of this tendency was visible in *Rosmersholm*. *The Lady from the Sea* is bolder in the use of thought-transference. In *The Master Builder* and *Little Eyolf* it is also carried to great lengths. The "fishy eyes" of the Stranger and the "magnetic eye" of the architect Solness, with their hypnotic power over others, are of great importance, not only for the characterization of those persons, but they are also general factors in the shaping of the events. This might be said even for "the great open eyes" of Little Eyolf. Solness credits himself with a mysterious gift of telepathic coercion. He can make people do his bidding by fixing his

eyes upon them, and can bring his wishes true by mere volition. "I merely stood and looked at her and kept on wishing intently that I could have her here";<sup>1</sup> or again: "Don't you agree with me, Hilda, that there live special, chosen people who have been endowed with the power and faculty of desiring a thing, craving it, willing it — so persistently and so — so inexorably, that at last it has to happen? Don't you believe that?"<sup>2</sup> To a few other occurrences of purposed or involuntary telepathic compulsion we must call attention. Little Eyolf is drowned at the very moment when his mother pronounces the malediction upon his "evil" eyes. Solness blames himself for having somehow, by his secret wish, brought about the conflagration of the old homestead. In *The Lady from the Sea* there are several striking incidents of the sort. The Stranger far out at sea, having learned of Ellida's marriage from an old newspaper, is seized with a violent rage. From that very day Ellida, being pregnant at the time, refuses to associate intimately with her husband. The eyes of the child that is born are discovered to have a most remarkable resemblance in color and expression to those of the strange sailor. At the approach of the English steamer, which, unknown to Ellida, carries the mysterious Stranger as one of its passengers, a presentiment lays hold of her; altogether, her increased nervousness just before the Stranger's return has to be explained likewise as the effect of mental influences.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. x, p. 217.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

## CHAPTER XV

### HEDDA GABLER

AFTER *The Lady from the Sea*, Ibsen demonstrated once more by practice his earlier belief that a drama is best when most direct. He dropped the occultist mantle, shook off the tightening clutch of the mysteries, and proclaimed himself again the master of artistic clarity. The very title of the new play, *Hedda Gabler* (1890), suggests a change of front, for it indicates a character study, not a thesis. With this drama English-speaking audiences are rather better acquainted than with any other by Ibsen, excepting *A Doll's House*.<sup>a</sup> Its early performance on the London stage, April 20-24, 1891, at the Vaudeville Theatre, by Miss Robinson and Miss Lea, created a sensation, and is pointed out by Mr. Archer to have been the second significant step towards the popularization of the great Scandinavian in England. Distinguished actresses of almost every nationality — Agnes Sorma, Eleonora Duse, Elizabeth Robins, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Nance O'Neill, Alla Nazimova, Marthe Brandes, to name just a few — have tried their prowess on the task of impersonating the principal of the play. To a less remarkable degree, yet each in his way forcibly enough, the other characters also challenge the best abilities of actors. And since *Hedda Gabler* is a character study, no more nor less, the task of any student of the play limits itself to something like a complete comprehension of the *dramatis*

*personæ*. We need hunt for no lesson, for the dramatist aims at none. "The lesson is for me," says Mr. Colby in his already quoted volume, "that there is no lesson, and the pleasure of it is merely that of intimacy with a fellow mortal to a degree seldom permitted off the stage and never allowed upon it by any modern English-speaking playwright who knows on which side his bread is buttered." <sup>b</sup>

Ibsen, in returning temporarily to the full-blooded realistic manner characteristic of *Pillars of Society* and *An Enemy of the People*, brings to bear on his work a still more disciplined skill than he had at any former time been capable of. The play in its kind stands quite alone. From the symbolic cycle it is widely separated by its manner, while to the dramas of social conditions it hangs by slender threads, if any. The "social aspect," that is, consists in the inhibitive power of the aggregate opinion over the principal's conduct, since she is as much a votary of public opinion as was Helmer or Bernick. Hedda was brought up by her father as a "society girl," on the punctilio of the military caste to which he belonged,<sup>c</sup> and without the softening influence of a mother. She acquired a correct and distinguished bearing and has maintained an irreproachable reputation, even though her sexual integrity was only physical, not also moral. Hedda was before her marriage a fairly perfect specimen of the unwholesome type described by Marcel Prévost as "demivierge"; she had a platonic love for vice and a fondness for dallying with what was forbidden. For instance, she was a willing listener to salacious stories of amorous adventures. From curiosity rather than from appetite she paltered with

temptations which she had neither the will to subdue nor the courage to yield to; and her virtue was amply safeguarded by a brace of unloaded pistols kept ready at hand expressly for the discomfiture of male temerity. Hedda's character suggests the virago: although she is devoid of a moral sense, yet the thought of abandoning herself to a man fills her with the dread of undying disgrace. Thus, for example, her vanity feels a certain resentment against her old friend Eilert Løvborg because their friendship did not "develop into something more serious." Yet she had threatened to shoot him down for attempting to be her lover.<sup>1</sup>

What could the late Grant Allen have been thinking of when he made that remark quoted, without protest, in Mr. Archer's introduction to the play, that Hedda was "nothing more nor less than the girl we take down to dinner in London, nineteen times out of twenty"?<sup>2</sup> Surely he pronounced this black calumny against English womanhood unintentionally. The remark, in any case unjustifiable, can be pardoned only on the charitable assumption that it was lightly prompted by a woeful incomprehension of Hedda's true character. Mr. Allen was deceived by her eligible exterior. She is abundantly endowed with good taste, social culture, a fair education, but ineffably poor in the qualities of the spirit. She is in a lasting state of intellectual and moral fatigue; knows no feelings, only "sensations," stimulations of the nervous system, such as playing with pistols — or with human lives. In the first sketch, Hedda is made to express a wish that she might be present at a public riot: —

<sup>1</sup> Vol. x, p. 101 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii f.



It must be a peculiar sensation being eye-witness to that sort of thing.

*Judge Brack.* Would you really like to?

*Hedda.* Certainly. Why not, just once? That is, if one were not seen; and nobody found it out.<sup>1</sup>

Hedda may be rightly regarded as the most repellent human being ever portrayed by Ibsen; it is a picture of womanhood at its worst. Possessed from childhood of a satanical envy, — she once threatened to burn the hair off a little schoolmate of hers, just because it was richer and prettier than her own, — she developed by degrees into a cold-hearted, perverse, and wholly negative individual. Since she cannot care for any living soul, her life is hollow, utterly without purpose. It is a clinching commentary upon her complete spiritual sterility that she shrinks with cold disgust from the ordeal and the responsibilities of approaching motherhood. Her nature is of the essence of capriciousness, void of every womanly affection, unadmixed with even an occasional kindly feeling for any living creature, and accompanied by an utter lack of capacity for any exaltation, whether moral or sensual.

Hedda, then, is another Rebecca, without the latter's capacity for enthusiasm, without any ideals, and without any positive traits susceptible of development; a human beast domesticated, socialized, and cowed into submission by the forces of heredity and conventional education. "Hedda," says Mr. Colby, "was one of those *sub voce* insurgents who wait until insurrections become respectable"; — she "would have liked to murder her husband if

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. iv, p. 98.

murder were in good repute," and "saw nothing wrong in adultery, but did think it impolite."<sup>d</sup>

There is a cunning suggestiveness in the use of her maiden name, instead of her married name, for the title of the play. Hedda is far more the daughter of General Gabler than the wife of Dr. Tesman.<sup>1</sup> Any explanation of her character would be far apart from the truth without the constant remembrance of her haughty and idle ancestry. Her marriage to George Tesman was a mercenary measure. She resorted to it when, after her father's death, the aging belle stood all alone with penury staring her in the face. The changed situation could not alter her pre-nuptial character. In marriage she remains the luxurious, pleasure-seeking, disdainful Hedda Gabler. Moreover, the matrimonial speculation turned out badly. From a rather one-sided point of view Professor Reich was justified in naming *Hedda Gabler* "the tragedy of the bad match" in contrast with *Ghosts*, which he calls "the tragedy of the good match."<sup>e</sup> Even socially Hedda has lowered herself by the alliance with this out-and-out pedant. Three days of his company sufficed to throw her delicate æsthetic sense into a perpetual state of rebellion. His pedantic *bourgeois* manners and habits have "gotten on her nerves." She is annoyed by his very speech, with that everlastingly repeated "Fancy that!" and the childishly astonished "What!" George Tesman is ridiculous in the eyes of his wife. Consider a bridegroom who spends his honeymoon gathering material for a *History of the House Industries of Brabant in the Middle Ages*! Hedda had miscalculated both his fortune and his professional future.

<sup>1</sup> C, p. 435.

Instead of having joined her existence to that of a profound if not brilliant scholar, she finds herself condemned for life to the society of an ashman of modern "original research;" one of the "academic beetles who gather into shapeless little fact-heaps or monographs the things that a scholar would throw away."<sup>f</sup> Withal, the strength of Tesman's character may be measured by his connivance in the nefarious theft of Lövborg's manuscript. Hedda's matrimonial disappointment is aggravated as she realizes the prematurity of her desperate decision; had she but waited another six months she might have married the only man who ever awakened her heart to softer feelings.

Eilert Lövborg, after being jilted by Hedda, because his ineligible habits obstructed his social future, had been rapidly sinking lower and lower and was almost level with the gutter when the helpful hand of Thea Elvsted stretched out to raise and steady him. The meek little woman became Lövborg's brave "comrade," in defiance of the conventions. Far inferior to Hedda in the charms by which most men are attracted, she accomplished, by the redeeming power of womanly sympathy, the miracle of reclaiming the degenerate genius for a life of work and regular habits and was able to arouse his sunken energy. His really remarkable ability is victoriously demonstrated by the production of a great book on an economic question. This has rehabilitated him at a single stroke before the academic as well as the public world. He has come to the city with the manuscript of a still more significant publication which is more than likely to win for him the professorship that Hedda covets so

greatly for her husband. Thea has followed him to keep a watchful eye on him, compromising her reputation as a married woman to keep Lövborg from relapsing into evil ways. Hedda, on the other hand, contrives to make him relapse into his abandoned mode of life. By a perverse chance Lövborg's manuscript falls into her hands, — it is called Eilert's and Thea's "child," with the same meaning as in *When We Dead Awaken* the master product of the sculptor and his model, — and cold-bloodedly, without a quaver of the conscience, she commits to death in the flames the irrecoverable labor of a great mind. After that this feminine monster drives the man himself to his death with the same *sang-froid* and without any cause or reason that would be comprehensible to ordinary human consciences.

As to the motives of Hedda's conduct, it is folly to exculpate her by sentimental reference to her condition, as has actually been done by one or two eminent critics. The most lenient interpretation has discovered one solitary extenuating circumstance: it is that some sort of affection lay back of her jealousy and, as concerns her slaying Lövborg by his own hand, that Hedda issues his death warrant from compassion, in order to free him from the necessity of dragging out a wholly ruined existence. But the faintest incipient sympathy for Hedda is effectively countered by the thought of the more immediate motives of her actions. She acts, in the first place, from petty jealousy and envy. The thought of her being eclipsed, to this man, by any living woman is more than her ungenerous heart can bear. But her criminal deeds are in reality perpetrated unreflectingly, all but unconsciously, by the quickening of a hideous sense of power over life and death.

In the preliminary study for the drama, this side of Hedda's character is made more strikingly apparent through her own explicit statement. Tesman wrings his hands impotently, exclaiming: —

Ah, Hedda, why did you, oh, why did you do that?

*Hedda.* It came over me unconsciously. Quite irresistibly. I simply *had* to see if I could lead him to a fall.<sup>1</sup>

Even in the final form of the drama, where Ibsen adhered more closely to the principle that the dramatic action should be self-explanatory, Hedda avows: "For once in my life I want to be master over a human fate."<sup>2</sup> Yet even this craving in her is unlike the ravenous indulgence of a magnificent large-featured egoism; rather is it the hankering for a new sensation, comparable to the decadent whims of a Faustina or Messalina, when Hedda hands Lövborg the death-bringing weapon and enjoins him to "die in beauty." It is a condign irony of fate that triteness and ugliness settle down like a curse on all affairs that she touches.<sup>3</sup> Lövborg's end proves no exception, for in his mortuary aspect the lamented genius has shockingly disobeyed Hedda's parting injunction. Moreover, the manner of Lövborg's death has involved Hedda herself in a very ugly dilemma: she must face exposure and public explanations or bribe the detestable Judge Brack into silence at the usual price assessed upon women of the world by blackmailers of their own social class. Her resolution to fly from the hateful alternative is motivated still more unmistakably in the sketch than in the drama itself.

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. iv, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. x, p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.



*Hedda.* Do you think it may be discovered? [that Lövborg was shot with one of her pet pistols.]

*Brack.* Not so long as I am silent. . . . I shall not abuse the situation.

*Hedda.* But nevertheless I am in your hand? Unfree! Unfree, then! Ah, this insupportable thought! I can't stand it! Never, never!<sup>1</sup>

There is nothing left for her inflexible pride except to carry out her own precept with better success than her unfortunate victim had done.

Her death is in every sense of the word a happy relief not only to Hedda herself, but to every witness of her fate who is capable of fathoming — and what could be easier — her character and temperament. It seems an altogether fitting ending, ethically and æsthetically truer than the forced happy finale of *The Lady from the Sea*, for we feel that, to whatever shifts Hedda's exorbitant pride was driven, the end would have been the same; even though courage or cowardice had restrained her from further wrongs — as was quite likely, since crime and sin are apt to jar with decorum, — she would have drifted to a tragic end by other courses. At best she would have killed herself from sheer ennui; and in any event we might have trusted her to shoot straight and in a tasteful pose. "Never was suicide less horrifying. So little of value was there in her that it seemed less like taking human life than like removing débris. Her soul, if she ever had one, had long since gone to the button-moulder." <sup>o</sup>

Those who persist in prating about Ibsen glorifying the heartless egoist are asked to consider how in his dramas egoism ends its career.

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. iv, p. 121.

To deny outright the existence of any model for such a paragon of unwomanliness would surely be a lesser exaggeration than is contained in that rapid epigram of Mr. Grant Allen. Emil Reich quite drastically compares Hedda to the "Demonstrationsgaul," the notorious sick-all-around horse in books on veterinary surgery — an equine monstrosity afflicted with all the diseases and infirmities which horseflesh is known to be heir to. Hedda Gabler was no true copy from life, but a skillfully composed eclectic picture, for which undoubtedly a number of living women had been laid under contribution. While no living man has observed the traits of Hedda Gabler in any human being in the same potency of proportions, men have declared themselves fairly familiar with them in less striking combinations, not to speak of the detached occurrence of this or that characteristic of our evil heroine. The same may be said of the outward incidents of the plot. Here Ibsen is found to have combined, not invented. It is worth while mentioning some of these things, as affording an insight into the poet's laboratory. The wanton destruction of Lövborg's manuscript was in all probability suggested by a rumor that the jealous wife of a very famous composer had revenged herself for a fancied neglect by burning up the manuscript of his just completed symphony.<sup>h</sup> At another turn the play exploits the gossip about a certain well-known lady whose husband had formerly been addicted to strong drink and had by force of will overcome the habit. One day the wife, in order to demonstrate her power over him, placed a large quantity of liquor in his room, with a result that justified her anticipations. At least one other matter deserves mention, as

being undoubtedly drawn from life. A young Danish friend of Ibsen, a brilliant and erudite man, appears to have lent some important features to the figure of Eilert Lövborg. Lövborg's visit to the red-haired Diana was affirmed by a certain clause in the young professor's testament and by his fondness in general for ladies that are fast and loose as to manners and morals. The same man, having fallen into intemperate habits, had the misfortune to lose a valuable manuscript. Of course, these things, and they might be multiplied, are not of any great importance in themselves, but they help us to establish a proper measurement of Ibsen's "realistic" mode of composition and help to explain why the characters in his plays stand out with such unusual vividness. Even truer to life than the erratic genius Eilert Lövborg who, with the bedraggled "vine-leaves in his hair,"<sup>1</sup> oscillates violently between the gutter and the Hall of Fame, are the laborious scholar George Tesman, so familiar to those that dwell in a college community, and his good spinster aunt Julia,<sup>2</sup> so cruelly treated by Hedda; not to forget the brave little Thea Elvsted and the case-hardened corruptor of virtue, Judge Brack.

Next to *Ghosts*, *Hedda Gabler* has been chosen out among Ibsen's works for vehement and uncritical reprobation. Decidedly it is an extremely unpleasant and painfully depressing play, and it brings no element of pleasure to that unduly numerous class of people who regard drama primarily in the light of an after-dinner auxiliary

<sup>1</sup> The now so hackneyed phrase was anticipated by Peer Gynt, saying, "Were there vine-leaves around, I would garland my brow." Vol. iv, p. 165.

to the digestion. Also, by persons who either could not or simply would not appreciate its great artistic excellence, *Hedda Gabler* has been much derided and burlesqued. It is not a difficult matter to please the risibilities by a grotesquely superficial seizure of any highly differentiated specimens of human character. Presumably the manufacturers of mirth to his majesty the mob experienced little trouble in eliciting laughter at the expense of Ibsen. That is a great man's unavoidable relation to buffoonery.

*Hedda Gabler* has also been interpreted about as much as it has been slandered and ridiculed. It contains no definite moralizings, as do so many other Ibsen plays, and no edifying wisdom apart from its artistic content. "It was not really my desire to deal in this play with so-called problems. What I principally wanted to do was to depict human beings, human emotions, and human destinies, upon a groundwork of certain social conditions and principles of the present day."<sup>1</sup> Nor does this play mark in any way a new progress of Ibsen's philosophy. Yet those who insist on cashing-in without grace the "lesson" of every work of the poet's art will find something in the nature of a lesson on the surface. In *Hedda Gabler*, Ibsen deals once more and, so far as a specific treatment of the question goes, for the last time, with woman's rights and her freedom. Hedda is a completely "emancipated" woman, but — as now and then befalls — the emancipation has gone too far, or else has moved in a wrong direction. For it has led her clearly out of the path of duty into a moral wilderness. No profitable order of society can exist

<sup>1</sup> *C*, p. 435.

divorced from domestic obligations. Ibsen, his thoroughgoing championship of female independence notwithstanding, abhorred the type of woman whose "social" interests lie wholly outside her family. And he simply loathed the Hedda Gablers of "society," surface idlers whose existence is equally barren at home and abroad. Instead of despising a woman for overstepping with as much as a single toe the bounds of social propriety, he saved his scorn and contempt for those who sacrifice substantial duties to the pursuits of emptiness. And yet to his indubitable sentence of guilty, the enigmatical daughter of General Gabler might have pleaded for herself, as might any of her sister sinners, in the words of the Master Builder: "Don't you understand that I cannot help it? I am what I am and I cannot change my nature."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. x, p. 201.



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE MASTER BUILDER

ALTHOUGH, in the final series of dramas to which we are now turning our attention, that new feature of Ibsen's technique which may fitly be called allegorical is predominant, yet no attempt, be it ever so serious, to grasp their inmost meaning should wholly take the place of artistic appreciation. Ibsen never expected, or intended, his plays to be studied merely for the sake of their philosophical content. For that he was too eminently and intently the practical playwright, and if some of his later plays are not wholly intelligible without constant reference to underlying meanings, that constitutes an undeniable weakness. The essential requisites of the theatric art are human personalities whose demeanor in weighty situations appeals to our æsthetic sense, quite apart from whatever esoteric messages the poet may have chosen to commit to their keeping. As Victor Hugo has classically put it: "L'homme sur le premier plan, le reste au fond."

Most of these plays, however, do carry hidden meanings and must be classed as parabolic or allegorical, as was *The Lady from the Sea* and, in a measure, before that, *Rosmersholm*. What is meant is that the main features of the action are designedly suggestive of larger meanings and special interpretations. As has been pointed out before,<sup>1</sup> the parabolic device seldom redounds to the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. pp. 218 f and 251 f.

advantage of a play so far as its specifically artistic values are concerned, and this is especially the case where the concrete transactions of a drama, because of their natural lines and hues, offer resistance to metaphorical investiture. I have no hesitation in saying that such seems to me to be the outstanding flaw in Ibsen's final works. They exhibit a noxious incongruity between the truth of the scene, the striking verisimilitude of the figures on the stage, with their everyday appearance, utter simplicity of speech and manner, and detailed individual peculiarity, and, on the other hand, the elaborateness of the abstractions which by word and action they are meant to convey. If it is difficult enough even for the great dramatist in the first place to turn fancy into fact, how much more difficult at once to reverse the process and to reconvert the hardly fashioned substance into the airy fabric of mental concepts and ideas. One cannot feel that in his last cycle of dramas Ibsen has been as signally successful in this difficult process of poetic transubstantiation as he was in *Brand*, or particularly in *Peer Gynt*, where the whole scenic enrobement serves as a constant reminder to look below the phenomena for their confidential message, whereas in the later works the realism of men and things prevents us from seeking recondite meanings.

The artistic value of *The Master Builder* ("Bygmester Solness," 1892)<sup>a</sup> is thus marred by too violent a contrast between its tangible and its transcendental essence, between the real and the ideal spheres between which the action perpetually oscillates. Such is not necessarily a fault inherent in the theme, for Gerhart Hauptmann, treating a very similar subject in *The Sunken Bell*, suc-

ceeded against still greater difficulties in attaining a far greater atmospheric consistency. Ibsen himself may have had misgivings on this score, for the first attempt at composing *Solness* was in verse. But the trouble stops not even here. Ibsen has not escaped the dangerous temptation, so powerful under the circumstances, of driving home the symbolic argument with force when persuasion has failed. I mean that where the realities would not yield to an intelligible translation into the idiom of ideal perceptions, disconcerting incursions of the imaginative elements into the realm of the actual are made to take place. Now the world concedes to the poet, quite willingly, the use of special media of communication, ciphers and cryptograms of his own, provided the secret language be susceptible of entire comprehension. His lofty purpose may condone some lack of directness. With poets, as with Jesuits, the end justifies the means. We accept thankfully any transcript of his secrets into the vernacular of our humbler understanding which a great artist deigns to make. But a too abrupt transition from one medium of expression to the other is very apt to prove distressfully confusing to our minds, and it is just because of this frequent shifting of the methods of communication that much of Ibsen's final meaning cannot get to us across the footlights. And this much is axiomatic, I take it, that no matter what be its cryptic, or cabalistic thought, a stage play must be completely intelligible and enjoyable in itself, as a work of art, apart from its philosophical connotation. Now it seems to me that in *The Master Builder* the looker-on is prevented from sinking himself entirely in the events that pass before his eyes; while we boggle about the symbolical

riddles, the natural dramatic effect is missed. Professor Grumann's plea for the "basic ideas" and "type figures"<sup>b</sup> is a poor *post festum* boon for the playgoer. The latter wants to understand and appreciate as he goes. The recurring hints as to secret meanings underlying the outer aspects of the events are bound to produce disenchantment; the poet's "romantic irony" pulls us up unawares out of our absorption, and that shakes our confidence not only in the reality of the particular transaction, but ends in destroying altogether the dramatic illusion. Ibsen was so much preoccupied with ideas in these latter-day dramas that the human fates of the *dramatis personæ* became submerged in reflections of autobiographical and of general philosophical import.

If, for instance, — and this is surely not an unfair test of a drama, — we were to divest the Master Builder of all the accoutrements of his allegorical office, if we were, so to speak, to detranscendentalize him, would his story still be able to interest us deeply? Or would it seem more queer than pathetic to us? It says much for the living strength of Ibsen's dramas that even in this stage of allegorical propensity they do not entirely lose hold of our human interest. Who, then, is this Architect Solness, who regards himself as an ally of unfathomed forces, when denuded of his mystagogical trappings and viewed in the flesh and blood, bones and sinews of his ordinary *genus humanum*? To put him into the same class with Eilert Lövborg, Ulrik Brendel, nay, even Johannes Rosmer, as has been done by an otherwise competent critic,<sup>c</sup> is missing the mark by a wide range. Though he has an Ibsenite family resemblance to those dreamers and impractical pursuers of the ideal,

he is different from them in the specific gravity of his character. Far from being sidetracked, like those others, from the main avenue to worldly success, Solness is above all things a worshiper of success and one of its high priests. Thus he seems linked in a close relationship with the rude men of action, the self-assertive masters of their fates and captains, not, to be sure, of their own souls, but too frequently of the souls of other men; to ruthless overmen of the business world who by dint of unrelenting energy have grown great and mighty in Philistia. Consul Karsten Bernick and the older Werle, and more particularly still, that paragon of a grand-scale moneymaker, John Gabriel Borkman, are prominent members of the same company. It would hardly do for Halvard Solness to disown this not altogether reputable family on the ground that they have fallen from grace, for in his own moral scope there lie the same possibilities of transgression. His wrongs against Knut Brovik and his son Ragnar prove it beyond a peradventure of doubt.

To forge to the very front in any department of practical life it is commonly thought that a man must be possessed of genius, or at least that he must command a large stock of superior virtues and abilities. As a matter of fact, however, a majority of the "men of might" do not confirm, upon a closer inspection of their qualities, the flattering popular explanation of their success. Of course a man, in order to succeed even in the sordidest meaning of the term, must have some uncommon qualifications. He must be forceful, industrious, firm of purpose, steady of nerve, an active and vigilant judge and commander of men, and must have developed to a marked extent the



ability to do at least one thing in the world conspicuously well. Much beyond this limit his character need not be developed. On the contrary, there is some probability that too fine a development of character would obstruct his way. The possession of very deep convictions, or a too scrupulous manner of weighing motives, would necessarily militate against his adopting those hard and grasping policies which, unfortunately, are apt to win in all the contests of business. And if the development of his tastes has gone far enough to make him more fastidious than the multitude, that also will operate not as a help, but as an impediment to the achievement of popular success. For the compact majority stands rigidly opposed to standards of culture and conduct that are different from its own, even though they be ever so much better, and "those who try to lead the people only do so by following the mob." Speaking, therefore, in a general way and with all due allowance for exceptions, idealism cannot in candor be regarded as an efficient adjutant in the struggle for superiority. Now Architect Solness presents himself as not so very different from the modern *conquistadores* of fame and fortune, resembling them even in the fact that he is self-made, not fortified for his career with the customary diplomas and certificates. But the first superficial estimate of his character is soon contradicted upon closer observation. Two opposite strains, the ruthlessly egoistic and the delicately sensitive, are present in his make-up; in fact, the dramatic story serves to disclose the inner conflict between the two ultimately irreconcilable main currents of his inner life.

In Norway as well as in some other countries there

are still some places where the completion of a new building is festally observed by a traditional ceremonial. Before a large gathering of people a bold climber, usually the builder himself, places a wreath on the very summit of the structure. This feat Halvard Solness, the self-made master of his craft, is called upon twice in his life to perform. The first time he crowned in this fashion the steeple of a church that he had erected; it was the last building he reared for the glory of God; henceforth he vowed to build only for men. The second time it was his own new house, on which, contrary to the custom, he had also set a steeple. Solness knew, from that first experience, that he was subject to vertigo, yet ten years afterward hazarded the other climb. He reached the top, fastened the wreath, and in that very act was overcome by his weakness, so that in the moment of his achievement he fell to his death. It was the penalty paid for going beyond his strength.<sup>4</sup> Solness knows that he is unequal to the feat, yet ventures it because his pride forbids him to belie the heroic estimate in which he is held by a young girl, Hilda Wangel, who is known to us from *The Lady from the Sea*. Solness saw her as a mere child when he had finished that church in Stolvanger. She showed herself at that time childishly enthusiastic, and the man acknowledged her admiration by a kiss and some fanciful promises. The incident had long passed from his remembrance when one day, quite unexpectedly, she appeared with bag and baggage to claim the "kingdom" he had promised her. In *The Lady from the Sea* Hilda's character is still undeveloped; she is a pert, precocious, and keenly observant young creature, with

more than a trace of cruelty in her temperament. She ill-treats the young sculptor Lyngstrand, from sheer pleasure in the wickedness of it, even putting him intentionally to physical suffering. Too practical to marry a penniless consumptive, she would be willing to pledge him her troth, just in order to secure an early chance of being admired in weeds. Altogether her conduct gives just cause for the prediction that she is bound to develop into a full-fledged Hedda Gabler.<sup>6</sup> Since then she has grown into a young woman of an undefinable character. In some ways she resembles the Master Builder. Like him, she is by instinct rapacious. She wants to possess Solness, although, or because, he belongs to another woman, and without really loving him, else she would not insist on his risking his life to please her whim. Her ruling ambition is to make Solness act the overman, and to this end she works upon his vanity and makes him court disaster. "So terribly beautiful and exciting," her pet phrase in *The Lady from the Sea*, goes far to characterize her. There is something of vampire nature in her, the promise of a fiendish wrecker of strong men. It is her jubilant shout, uttered heedless of every warning, thoughtless of everything but her own triumph, when Solness has reached the pinnacle, that fells the Master to death. It is almost like a contest of strength between the two, in which the man succumbs. And, curiously enough, with Hilda, as with her idolized Master Builder, excessive self-love is hampered by an incongruous streak of humanity, a species of atavistic conscience. For instance, she is deeply indignant over Solness's injustice to poor old Brovik in concealing his son's superior ability.

The simple plot of our drama derives its main interest not from its literal but from its transferred meaning, and this is of a twofold description. The play must be read with due regard to its symbolical and autobiographical content. The principal figure typifies, in his largest symbolical function, the eternal combat between the aspirations of the passing and the arriving generations, thus personifying the pioneering radicalism of his own time. He has forced his way to leadership by dint of an immense faculty for labor, a genius for organization, a power of inspiring confidence, an immovable courage, and a good measure of hard rapacity. He has been the master builder of his period, and has built according to his own liking. In any province of life, however, the tenure of primacy is limited, and Halvard Solness feels with dismay that his position in the van is already imperiled. Even as he has crowded out and trampled under foot his predecessors and contemporaries, so now he already seems to feel the pressure of the oncoming successors that must inevitably replace him. To save his prestige he has stooped to basest oppression. Old Brovik, whom he has ruined by unfairest means, serves him as a faithful slave. Now the fear of being outstripped by Brovik's highly gifted son, Ragnar, drives him to desperate and contemptible devices. In Solness's attitude the historic fact repeats itself again that the revolutionary of yesterday becomes the conservative of to-day and the reactionary of to-morrow. This will ever be true, whatever material a man build in, be it in science, in the arts, or in statecraft. It is claimed concerning a man's physical age that he is as old as his arteries; spiritually a man's old age commences at that moment

when factious antagonism to new ideas and their advocates lays hold of his soul. The decline of a great man's powers is not conditioned upon bodily decrepitude. As far as his years go and his physical strength, Solness is still in his prime, but we see that his usefulness has departed, because he would foolishly thwart a law of nature by which the younger generation can build higher than the older. At this point the concrete features of the action assert their right to some consideration. Ragnar Brovik is prevented by Solness from rising in the profession, because the Master realizes that he himself has lost the power to rise. More than one reason may be guessed why his strength has gone from him. The Master Builder has sacrificed to the fetish of success his own happiness and the happiness of others. With youth his affections and illusions are gone. His whole nature is now warped from its nobler design.

The end of the struggle is attained, yet somehow the superman discovers himself to be cheated out of the fruit of his heroic ruthlessness. The tragical complication is simply this, that his iron will was not supported by an iron conscience. This is made clear in numerous ways, above all by the fact that to the real transgressions of his strenuous career his "gnawing conscience" (the expression occurs in the first draft of this play <sup>1</sup> as later in *Little Eyolf*) superadds an imaginary culpability. He holds himself guilty of the death of his children, the desolation of his home, his wife's incurable despondency, all due to the fire that destroyed the old homestead. He had nothing to do with that directly, yet his conscience accuses

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, p. 234; cf. also, *ibid.*, p. 318.



him of arson and murder. It had been his artist dream of old to erect a new edifice in the place of the family house, and since he lacked the hardihood to demolish the old place, he nursed a secret wish that it might catch fire. And Solness, as we know, believes in the power of his wishes to come true. It is the same motive that occurred in *Rosmersholm* and is resumed later in *Little Eyolf*. All in all, Solness is an infelicitous mixture of egoist and sentimentalist, and it is the incompatibility between his rude will and his tender sensibilities that unbalances the Master Builder's inner equilibrium. How can he regain that and replenish his declining strength, unless by a wonder the gift of youth be his once more? And while he muses over the impossible, it arrives at the most unexpected moment. Its personification is Hilda, the incarnation of Solness's longing. But when rejuvenescence is almost within his grasp, he cannot meet the conditions of the gift. It is one thing to design steeples, another thing to climb to their top. Spurred to the mad attempt by the urge of young ideals and the imperative challenge of hope, the great builder is dashed to the ground, the overman must perish among the multitude. The Master Builder's end is typical. Perhaps it is one of its meanings that such is the inevitable fate of the disciple of Zarathustra, when in a world of men, not overmen, he would carry out his chimerical designs. It is not such an extraordinary performance of the imagination to paint in vivid lines and colors the ideal concepts of Nietzsche's philosophy, but as soon as the attempt is made to adopt them for the uses of life, the end must be dismay and disaster; and the builders of castles in the air have so far, without

exception, had to confess their inability to reach up to their aerial mansions, to climb as high as they can build. Nor is it needful to assume that they are always dragged down by lower powers from the levels of their loftiest ambitions. It is enough that in those heights they are taken with vertigo.

It is at this point that a second veil would seem to be drawn from the mysterious face of the Master Builder. The introspective and retrospective content of the play comes to view. Its meaning is an indication of the poet's inmost soul-life. Have we any right to inquire for this meaning? We know well enough that Ibsen frequently grew indignant over attempts to get at the "tendency" or idea of his works. He went so far as actually to deny the existence of any definite "tendency," yet we have had ample opportunity to observe how strenuous he was in support of convictions, with what emphasis, nay vehemence, he staked his very existence upon the cause of light and right. Poets so constituted may say what they please about the absence of ethical motives; we must trust our common sense in this matter more than their denials. Ibsen, who anyway was far from consistent in this denial, had plainly an object in his prevarication. It was to safeguard his dramas against an undue shift of the public attention from their principal purpose to the subordinate. For however lofty the symbolical purpose be, Ibsen was right in regarding as the prime function of the dramatist the presentation of human beings, not of intellectual concepts. One thing, though, he seemed to forget. Whereas the transient guest at the dramatic feast, the casual and more or less distracted visitor at the theatre,

is more than willing to take the poet at his word and not look for anything below the surface of the "show," the profounder study of dramas such as Ibsen's must invariably lead into the consideration of purposes and ideas; and if we descend to the mainsprings of the action, we are sure to touch motives that may be traced ultimately to experiences of an intimately personal nature. Ibsen guarded his good right to set barriers against spying curiosity. The student, on the other hand, may use his well-established privilege of going irreverently as near to the heart of the poet's secret as is conducive to the fullest understanding of the poet's work. To go farther than that, however, cannot be the legitimate office of the literary critic and historian. He has no use for the ancient silliness of identifying unceremoniously each leading character with the author's self, and of glibly deriving every incident from facts and events in the author's life. Still, though nobody familiar with Ibsen's personality would countenance his identification with Solness in any external meaning of the term, yet there need be no harsh contradiction here between the direct and the symbolical interpretation. Solness is not Ibsen, but the former's fate is a symbol of the latter's. It is now definitely known that Ibsen drew upon his own experience for the main incident of the drama, the entrance of Hilda Wangel into the life of the elderly Master Builder. The publication of Ibsen's letters to Emilie Bardach<sup>7</sup> leaves no doubt of her having been the prototype of Hilda. Ibsen met the young Viennese lady in 1889, while spending the summer at one of his favorite resorts, Gossensass in the Tyrol. Between the poet, then in his sixty-third year, and his

ardent admirer of eighteen, there sprang up an extraordinary attachment which, on the girl's side far more than on the old man's, assumed a sentimental coloring. A picture of Ibsen in Miss Bardach's possession bore this inscription in his handwriting: "An die Maisonne eines Septemberlebens" (To the May sun of a September life). Ibsen, without quite losing his head, was deeply affected by this episode in his life, whose striking analogy to that of Goethe with Marianne Willemer he did not fail to realize. Seven years after his acquaintance with Miss Bardach, on his seventieth birthday, Ibsen received from her a congratulatory note. His reply proves that the adventure on his side, too, left a sentiment.

VERY DEAR MISS BARDACH:—Accept my most cordial thanks for your letter. That summer at Gossensass was the happiest, the most beautiful in all my life. I hardly dare to think of it, — and yet I must do so forever, — forever! Your devoted,  
H. I.

But a far more important autobiographical significance shines through the elaborate dramatic disguise. It is the correspondence between the spiritual tenor of the play and the drift of the poet's own life. Before this play was written, Ibsen's lifework was practically done. If he did not clearly realize it, he surely must have at least suspected that his position in the world's literary record would rest on what he had achieved and not on what he might still accomplish. As his creative power was breaking up, did he perchance pay his tribute to the frailty of human nature by conceiving a bitter feeling toward the younger generation of poets which would supplant him and usurp his place? It is even believed that Gerhart

Hauptmann's tragedy, *Einsame Menschen*, which had appeared a short while before, had ripened in the old poet the painful realization that he was condemned to stand still and see others climb to higher pinnacles than he had reached. His return to Scandinavia in 1891, after nearly thirty years of expatriation, at a time when his fame stood in its very zenith, was construed as a retreat before competition. His disciples were bidding fair to outstrip him. A new form of dramatic art had sprung into existence through his efforts, but the younger school had gone beyond him. The Master Builder who has kept the talents of younger rivals in subjection may be lured by the genius of a miraculous second youth to scale a still greater height; but he feels that he must fall, that his fall, indeed, is a historic necessity in order that the way may be cleared for the rising generation. The building stands, but the builder has to perish. Another pang may have entered his soul at the thought of the tragical discrepancy between achievement and happiness, — the thought that crops out so strongly in *When We Dead Awaken*. At what inestimable sacrifice of personal happiness had his success been attained! Had he not sapped his very life and offered its essence to a but half-comprehending world? Whenever he appeared at the top of the steeple, at the risk of life, he was filled with uncertainty about how the gaping crowd below would react to his performance: now they would vociferate and wildly wave their salutes, and the next moment they might want to drag him from his proud position to their own depth.

Lastly, he may have yielded to a still more saddening contemplation. Ibsen's plays have been characterized



as a code of social criticism in dramatic form. Throughout all that he has written Ibsen holds a grand and severe reckoning with the world. Most other people, he discovered, were entangled in hypocrisy, yet frequently the thought might have come to him that is articulated in the drama of *The Master Builder*: Had he, Henrik Ibsen, the full courage of truth? The courage to be absolutely himself, and — here we touch the veriest core of the Solness problem — the courage to live up to the ideals that he had evolved and proclaimed? Or was he, like Architect Solness, afflicted with vertigo when up on high? Thus Solness is shamed by Hilda's query: "Is it so, that my Master Builder dares not — cannot — climb as high as he builds?"<sup>1</sup>

The general analogy between Solness and Ibsen can be carried with some profit to particulars. Indubitably the churches which Solness built at the outset of his career represent the early romantic plays; the "homes for human beings" stand for his social dramas, and the houses with high towers for those spiritual dramas, with their wide outlook upon the metaphysical domain, on which Ibsen was henceforth to be engaged; the tower has ever been a symbol of spiritual elevation.<sup>2</sup> Significant is this passage in Act II: —

*Solness.* And now I shall never — never build anything of that sort again! Neither churches, nor church towers.

*Hilda.* Nothing but houses for people to live in?

*Solness.* Houses for human beings, Hilda.

*Hilda.* But houses with high towers and pinnacles upon them.

*Solness.* If possible.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. x, p. 315.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

And the following in Act III:—

*Solness.* I believe there is only one possible dwelling-place for human happiness, and that is what I am going to build now.<sup>1</sup>

At this point Professor Paul H. Grumann's highly suggestive explanation of Hilda as a personification of Ibsen's youthful ambitions is well worth considering. To Grumann, Hilda becomes thoroughly plausible at a stroke when we think of her as the "type figure" of the ideal, for "we have come to think of the ideal as exacting, cruel, relentless, persistent, and objective. . . . Solness has substituted for the higher ideal (of building character) an inferior one, he hypnotizes himself into believing that the building of homes is better than the building of temples — with growing age the old ideals again make themselves felt, but he cannot rise to church building (*Brand*, and the romantic plays); he constructs a hybrid form — a dwelling with a tower — an architectural monstrosity."<sup>h</sup> Such emphatic disavowal of his middle works seems improbable in the extreme. The analogy deserts us here, since it cannot be asserted for Ibsen as for Solness that he "sold himself for a business chance" when he turned his attention to social drama. Believing, with many others, that in the social dramas resides Ibsen's true greatness, I cannot accept it as the central thought that a man who forsakes his highest ideal and attempts to find success by unworthy means will come to grief in that he will again be confronted by his former ideals and these ideals will drive him to ruin. I must admit, nevertheless, that there is force in Grumann's pointing to the reappearance of this central thought in *When We Dead Awaken*.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. x, p. 354.

Whether or no the play is in reality as deeply indebted to the poet's self-examination as I am inclined to believe, this much is certain, that with the final return to his native country Ibsen's poetry passed into an almost purely psychological phase. The external conflicts serve only to incite the internal; the crises and their solutions are independent of the outer events. Polemics are now wholly absent, and even satire is almost totally suppressed. Otto Brahm, the man who did so much to give Ibsen his hold on the German stage, states the case truly when he says that in these last years Ibsen "gazes, not satirically, but rather in a lyric mood, into the secret places of human nature and the wonders of his own soul." What wonder that in this lyric mood poetic conceits of long ago should have risen up again. As long as thirty-five years before *The Master Builder*, Ibsen wrote a poem *Building Plans* ("Byggeplaner," 1858). There he speaks of himself as planning a cloud castle that should shine all over the North. "It shall have two wings; the great wing shall shelter a deathless poet, the little wing serve a young girl for her bower."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, p. 97. (*Baupläne*); *M*, vol. III, p. 25 (*Byggeplaner*). The second stanza runs: —

Et skyslot vil jeg bygge. Det skal lyse over Nord.  
 To flöje skalder vaere; en liden og en stor.  
 Den store skal huse en udödelig skald;  
 Den lille skal tjene et pigebarn til hal.

## CHAPTER XVII

### LITTLE EYOLF

AFTER his accustomed interval of two years, Ibsen finished a new drama, to which he gave the title, *Little Eyolf* ("Lille Eyolf," 1894). Early in the following year this domestic drama in three acts was mounted on the stage, — the German rendition, with Agnes Sorma and Emanuel Reicher in the principal parts, preceding again by a brief time the Norwegian *première* at Christiania.<sup>a</sup> *Little Eyolf* enjoys a modicum of popularity without having, to my knowledge, attained as yet to the success of a long "run" or to a fixed position in the repertory of the modern theatre. The obvious reason why this piece has incurred managerial disfavor (even though actresses like Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Madame Nazimova have been signally successfully in the rôle of Rita) is the minimal outward action, — one is tempted to say the total absence of any incident after the first act. Besides, the play does not cater to the popular demand for sentiment; it lacks what the magnates of the theatrical trust are accustomed to call "heart interest." It is analytical, and processes of psychological analysis can have no very great attraction for people not grounded in the elements of psychological science. A play that has for its main purpose a close and subtle analysis of character can hardly be expected to make a strong appeal to the inartistic throng that makes up the bulk of our theatrical audiences.

At the same time it must be said, in extenuation of the playgoer's lukewarm attitude, that the poet has again impaired the chances of success by the tortuosities of the allegorical design. This time we really have no choice left. If the play is to have any deeper meaning, its sense must be dug out or divined according to individual habits and ability. It is of course a question whether the interest of a superb characterization is not sufficient to establish *Little Eyolf* in the favor of students of the drama. In any case it is not likely that many would contradict Mr. Archer when he refers to the second act as quite the most poignant, and to the third as one of the most moving, that Ibsen ever wrote.

We can readily understand why dramatic occurrences were banished from this play. A notable exception is, of course, Little Eyolf's death, which was indispensable for the spiritual run of events; but even the death of Little Eyolf is treated sketchily, — we are not given definitely to understand to what extent accident is responsible, or the "evil eye," of the Ratwife, or the evil wish of the mother. The attention of the spectator was not to be distracted unnecessarily from the portrayal of soul-life and the close interpretation of character. Now it is at least an open question whether the employment of romantic elements and even of legend and fairy tale is consonant with the analytical purpose. But Ibsen has seen fit to stray into the alluring paths of the mysteriously unreal, and we have to make the best of it. The poet did not rely on his inventive powers alone for the weird effects that were to be produced. The shrunken little Ratwife, with her black hood and red umbrella and



the black-snouted Mopseman, seems to have been a local application of the legend of the "Pied Piper," made with reference to a real person. Ibsen himself informed Count Prozor that the original of the Ratwife was a little old woman who came to kill rats at the school he attended. She carried a little dog in a bag, and it was said that children had been drowned through following her.<sup>1</sup> The Ratwife, like the Stranger in *The Lady from the Sea*, is susceptible of various symbolical interpretations. Most plausibly she signifies death, as does the Button-Moulder in *Peer Gynt*. Some critics define her, however, as a warning messenger of the higher powers, a figure to be classed with the faithful Eckart of German folklore or the Kundry of the Holy Grail saga. Maeterlinck and his neo-romantic followers are devoted to the use of similar weird creations of the popular fantasy. Still others view the "Rottejomfruen" as the embodiment of pessimism in the more technical philosophic sense of the term. The world is undesirable, and the Ratwife acts as a bringer of peace by luring creatures to death. Still, if the presence of elements beyond the natural be felt to be obtrusive in the soberly realistic premises, we are not compelled to take this view of the nature of the Ratwife. With some good will and a little effort there is nothing to hinder us from reducing her to terms of reality without detracting from her symbolical office; even the graveyard smell that she brings with her may be accounted for as the exhalation from the "blessed little creatures" that follow her in myriads. Under such rationalistic explanation Little Eyolf is not subdued by witchcraft, but, allured by her odd looks,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vol. XI, p. vii.

he follows, and at the water leans too eagerly over to watch her strange performance.

One allusion will remain mysterious, whichever way we look at the "Rottejomfruen." Who is her "sweet-heart" whom she lured all by herself, without the faithful Mopseman's help, down to "where all the rats and ratikins are"? He belongs to the realm of pure guesswork. The most intrepid spellers of signs are at a loss to make this puzzle out. The only living person who suspects himself of knowing the truth, Mr. William Archer, coyly declines to give it away. "To tell the truth, I have even my own suspicions as to who is meant by 'her sweetheart,' whom she 'lured' long ago, and who is now down where the rats are. This theory I shall keep to myself; it may be purely fantastic, and is at best inessential."<sup>1</sup> And so we are left in the dark. At all events, the symbolism in *Little Eyolf* is not by any means as vexatious as that in *The Lady from the Sea*. Its general meaning at least is patent. *Little Eyolf* is the story of two people temperamentally almost as different as were Johannes Rosmer and Rebecca West. Their struggle is apparently blended in the poet's mind with the larger and typically human struggle between instinct and responsibility, and his attitude marks a new turn in his ethics. The poet who at one time defended so irrefragably the supremacy of the natural impulse, sides now visibly with the opposite tendency. As in *Rosmersholm*, the representative of the primitive instincts is in this drama a woman, hot-blooded, and so deeply absorbed in her wild sexual craving for her husband that even the maternal instinct is drowned in the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vol. XI, p. xiii.

fiery wave of that passion. Since Rita wants Alfred's love undivided all for herself, his tenderness for their poor crippled boy fans her jealousy into hatred.

*Allmers.* I must divide myself between Eyolf and you.

*Rita.* But if Eyolf had never been born? What then?

*Allmers.* Oh, that would be another matter. Then I should have only you to care for.

*Rita (softly, her voice quivering).* Then I wish he had never been born.<sup>1</sup>

In its way Rita's love for Alfred Allmers is boundless, yet in the last analysis of her motives she becomes repugnant in her unmitigated animalism, a creature that justifies the gynophobia of an Alexander Strindberg or the notorious "Weibchen"-theory of Laura Marholm. "I will live my life together with you — wholly with you. I cannot go on being only Eyolf's mother — only his mother and nothing more. I will not, I tell you! I cannot! I will be all in all to you! To you, Alfred."<sup>2</sup> And yet she dwells wholly outside his moral and intellectual range and is a total stranger to the serener atmosphere in which he, the thoughtful, self-possessed scholar, has his being.

In one sense the situation in *The Lady from the Sea* recurs, with the parts reversed. Allmers is the very opposite of Rita in temperament and purpose, and married her only for "practical" reasons, so that her money might further his scholarly ambitions and provide comfort for his beloved Asta, whom he believes to be his sister. But another situation is similarly recalled, namely, that existing between Torvald Helmer and his wife. Once more we are confronted with a marriage that is not bound by any spirit-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vol. xi, p. 48 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

ual tie. But here it is the man who achieves his emancipation. Enthralled at first by Rita's beauty, Alfred slips step by step into a vapid sensuous existence. A temporary separation teaches him to "bring his desires into harmony" with his sense of responsibility. A revulsion against Rita takes place in his feelings.<sup>b</sup> The tragedy that overtakes this already inwardly disrupted union, instead of healing the breach, rives the parties still farther asunder. Their self-reproaches and mutual recriminations reveal the fact that in this marriage the child was hardly more than a by-product of confluent sensual egoisms. The headlong self-indulgence of the parents is to blame for Eyolf's incurable infirmity.<sup>1</sup> Alfred, although he certainly loved the boy, tortured him by a system of education calculated to realize in Little Eyolf his own abandoned hopes of eminence. The boy's sudden death falls with peculiarly crushing force for this reason; and Rita's conscience pronounces her guilty of having murdered the child by her wish that he had never been born. The motive has an obvious similarity to the consequence of mental influence introduced in *Rosmersholm* and in *The Master Builder*. And the same effect of the children's death upon the parents occurs here as in the last-named tragedy — their happiness has fled never to return. In the prior framing of *Little Eyolf*, Alfred reads aloud a poem that was conceived much earlier than the play and had already left the mark of its influence on one of Ibsen's dramas. Ibsen designates this poem as the first *brouillon* for *The Master Builder*. It dates from 1892 and is styled *De Sad Der, De To* ("They Sat There, the Two").

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vol. XI, p. 94.

In the original it reads as follows:—

De sad der, de to, i saa lunt et hus  
ved høst og i vinterdage.  
Saa brændte huset. Alt ligger i grus.  
De to faar i asken rage.

For nede i den er et smykke gemt, —  
et smykke, som aldrig kan brænde.  
Og leder de trofast, hænder det nemt  
at det findes af ham eller hende.

Men finder de end, de brandlidte to,  
det dyre, ildfaste smykke, —  
aldrig hen finder sin brændte tro,  
han aldrig sin brændte lykke.<sup>1</sup>

The hopeful conclusion of *Little Eyolf* ill consorts with the sad outlook implied in the poem. The end of the conjugal crisis savors of plasters and patches that do not overly impress us with their cohesive virtue. It is by far too superficial a cure which is to infuse peace and meaning into two widely differing but equally selfish existences. The transition to a purified, wholly altruistic life of work in a common cause, symbolized as the conclusion of the drama by the hoisting of the flag to the top of the staff, seems too sudden in any case. Departing from his customary method, which was to reveal by means of the action fixed characters that have merely been traveling *incognito*, Ibsen here suits a different method to his new object. For we must bear in mind the significant change of front in his ethics. Instead of a renewed vindication of the instinctive rights of man — and woman — as

<sup>1</sup> For a fine metrical translation into German cf. *SW*<sup>n</sup>, vol. iv, p. 175 f.; for the English prose translation, *CW*, vol. x, p. xxiii.



they are proclaimed in *A Doll's House*, we have in *Little Eyolf* an exaltation of the duty of self-restraint. The enterprise of depicting a transformation of human character caused by passing through a great crisis was worthy of Ibsen's dramatic powers, yet its success must be questioned. He attempted to transmute extinct love into live philanthropy. Alfred and Rita are to devote themselves, under a self-imposed monastic way of life, to the elevation of young people to nobler standards of existence, the idea being repeated from *Rosmersholm* with, however, a more practical application. But I doubt whether the transformation of these two is wholly plausible even under the mystic "Law of Change" on which Alfred loves to dwell.<sup>1</sup> We can understand Rita's passion for atonement, even her sudden intelligent recognition and assumption of the responsibilities of motherhood, and we can understand that, since she can never more have children of her own, she wants to be a mother to other children. What we cannot grasp so well is her immediate ascension to a sphere of permanent serenity. Can we really believe that her fires are dead? Or are they smouldering under their ashes to leap of a sudden into another consuming blaze? The finish seems as temporary as in *The Lady from the Sea*, where we could not look with very great confidence into the future bliss of Ellida and Dr. Wangel. Both endings issue out of the poet's convictions and desires rather than out of the inner workings of the characters as they are presented.

The dramatic force of the piece suffers, in my judgment, still further through the unimpressive and unengaging

<sup>1</sup> Vol. XI, p. 55; *ibid.*, p. 92, etc.

personality of the leading man. Ibsen had planned to represent Allmers as a famous scholar. In the preliminary sketch, Skjoldheim (= Allmers) is the author of numerous important works, and is now just on the eve of producing his *magnum opus*, "The Doctrine of the Life Spiritual."<sup>1</sup> In his present character he is a Utopian dreamer, with fine abstract theories about responsibility. So far as his practical achievements go, Allmers is about as interesting and sympathetic as the dry-as-dust partner so illy mated with Hedda Gabler.

Still further is the effectiveness of the play marred by a complicating underplot which is not tightly interlocked with the main interest. Introduced chiefly for the relief of monotony, the by-action between Alfred and Asta, which revolves about the familiar and too hard-ridden theme handled by Goethe in *Die Geschwister*, is not convincingly resolved. Asta, who loves Alfred, wrongly supposed to be her brother, accepts at last her suitor Borgheim without even enlightening him about the true state of her feelings. Engineer Borgheim, by the way, along with such other figures as Dr. Fieldbo in *The League of Youth*, or Captain Horster in *An Enemy of the People*, so full of energy, cheeriness, efficiency, and human kindness, belies the fabled limitations of Ibsen to the depictment of criminals, lunatics, and misanthropes.

More than any technical imperfections, the socio-ethical drift of *Little Eyolf* would be sure to operate insurmountably against a favorable reception from our conservative public, if this public gave any thought to the tenor and thesis of this very serious drama. I am by no

<sup>1</sup> *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. iv, p. 147 f.

means referring to its open sexual allusions and implications, for in this regard Ibsen did not depart from his accustomed discretion and delicacy despite the ticklish features of his composition, especially the voluptuousness of the beautiful heroine and the struggle of a man and a woman who believe themselves to be brother and sister against a powerful mutual sex attraction. On these grounds the legitimate moral sensibilities of serious people will find small reason for offense in *Little Eyolf*. In fact, a quite different, and anything but serious, class of people who are, from other motives, likewise deeply concerned about stage morals, have in the simplicity of their good souls, licensed this play because they failed to understand any of its meaning outside the high resolutions at the end: I mean the inveterate patrons of conventional drama. Somehow a belated taste in matters pertaining to literature goes almost invariably with a denseness of intellect through which the subtler poisons of dangerous doctrine cannot percolate. The conventionalist, if he knows anything at all about Ibsen, may even be seen pointing with satisfaction to *Little Eyolf* as a proof of Ibsen's abandonment of ultra-radicalism and his return to the standing moral notions of "general humanity." But would the latter really follow from the former?

The plain fact of the matter is that in *Little Eyolf* a theory of marriage is preached which, to my knowledge, has only one other open advocate among the great social thinkers of modern times; the same theory, namely, that is advanced in Tolstoy's *Kreutzer-Sonata*. In Ibsen the sexual austerity not uncommon with Northerners grew into asceticism,<sup>c</sup> so that carnal love, even though legalized

and sanctified, became for him almost like an aberration of human nature, an uncleanness and outright evil. In his dramas persons of a sensual temperament are either depraved, like Regine and Rebecca; or gross and brutal, like the lecherous Ulfheim in *When We Dead Awaken*; or mentally under-developed, like little Fru Maja in the same play. In *Little Eyolf* this spiritual aversion to sensuality has its strongest expression. Remember how pointedly the child's misfortune is traced to the incontinence of the parents. Since by the outcome of the play the maintenance of platonic relations between husband and wife would seem to be commended, Ibsen is apprehended in the preposterous tenet that happy marriages must be childless. Marriage should consist in a complete intellectual junction of two personalities, a comradeship that fuses the spirits while it purifies the grosser instincts. The marriage of Rita and Alfred to have been ideal would have been childless. So Little Eyolf had no business to live! Perhaps Ibsen's social philosophy was going through its last pessimistic phase. At least the Epilogue, *When We Dead Awaken*, does not support the theory of platonic marriage.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN

NEXT in the chronological order of Ibsen's works comes *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896),<sup>a</sup> a play which, without losing its connection with the psychological series, lengthens out by still another link the chain of dramas that deal primarily with social conditions.

Its autobiographical allusion, if any there be, has not been discovered. Its source or sources, doubtless of the anecdotal description, were not divulged by the poet. But the plot is undoubtedly founded on certain occurrences during the period just preceding, when "frenzied finance" was rife in the Norwegian capital. It was probably suggested also by the sequel of certain large defalcations, in which an officer of high rank was one of the chief culprits. This man, having undergone a term in prison, returned to live in the same house with his wife; but they never exchanged a word of conversation. It is not known how much use was made of "models." About one of the characters, the pathetic figure of old Foldal, an interesting disclosure is made, but he was originally intended for *The Lady from the Sea*.<sup>b</sup> The resemblance of the main movement of this drama to the coarser machinery of *Pillars of Society* is too obvious to have failed of extended notice. And in minor ways, too, *John Gabriel Borkman* seems like a conscious renewal of an old theme, a refinement upon that sensationally successful piece



which fell so far short of the later standards of its maker.

The central figure of the new drama is a Bernick raised to higher power; the self-seeker impelled by a larger ambition, endowed with greater imagination and a stronger will-power, clinging with greater pertinacity to his aims, and carrying out in his evil fate the logical consequences of his evil deeds. In him we have a self-styled overman with the full courage of his perverse convictions, the frank exponent of the super-scoundrel's code of morals — the "overskurkens moral," to borrow his own name for it, joined to a different subject. Borkman is the sublimation of the unscrupulous, ruthlessly daring type of the speculator, the superman in business at whose shrine so many thoroughly honest and just as thoroughly weakminded people are everywhere found worshiping. He belongs unquestionably to the type too often found among "leading citizens," men who lead the people — but whither? In reading his own character he translates the insatiable greed for wealth and power into an uncontrollable desire to serve and benefit the race; and succeeds, while we are in his presence, in bribing our judgment into viewing him as a visionary idealist, whereas before impartial justice he is plainly a criminal. What saves him from our utter condemnation and contempt, at all events, is his ravishing power of imagination, that divine spark of poetry that is so sadly missed in many of his more fortunate compeers. Yet in motives and ambitions he might be easily taken for some living member of the House of Lords of Business. "Think of me, who could have created millions! All the mines I should have controlled! New

veins innumerable! And the waterfalls! And the quarries! And the trade-routes, and steamship lines all the wide world over! I should have organized it all — I alone!"<sup>1</sup>

Happiness to him means power over unlimited resources, in other words unlimited power over his fellow-men. The bitterest experience cannot chasten this moral misconception. Condemned as a felon because of it, after six years in a convict's cell and eight of close imprisonment in his own apartments, he would go to prison again if chance willed it a second time. Men of his cast of mind endowed with only an ordinary cash-box imagination have been known to figure their chance better than he between immense fortune and indelible infamy, — now and then they are far-seeing enough to take into account the beneficent workings of statutes of limitations.

Borkman's egomania completely blinds him to his turpitude. He even moralizes, comments mercilessly on the wickedness of others, and scores them as robbers and pirates. There is a telling bit of tragic irony when the poet makes him explain sententiously and with the chest note of deep conviction: "The most infamous of crimes is a friend's betrayal of his friend's confidence."<sup>2</sup> This applies to his former friend Hinkel, and Borkman's mere suspicion that his own words might be drawn upon him fires him into rage. *He* never betrayed a confidence; for it goes without saying that the people whose securities he pilfered "should have got them all back again — every farthing."<sup>3</sup> The good intention exculpates him before his conscience. Overmen are exempt from the observance of laws. Borkman, like Rebecca West, possesses

<sup>1</sup> Vol. XI, p. 221 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

a sort of inverted nobility and grandeur of which he remains keenly conscious: "I had power in my hands! And then I felt the irresistible vocation within me! The prisoned millions lay all over the country, deep in the bowels of the earth, calling aloud to me! They shrieked to me to free them! But no one else heard their cry — I alone had ears for it."<sup>1</sup> Again: "The whole world knows [of my transgressions]. But it does not know why I did it; why I had to do it."<sup>2</sup> The Napoleon of commerce and industry, alas, was not one appointed of fate, else he would not have been "crippled in his first battle." Yet the crushing defeat of those hopes, the loss of everything he had, the ruin of his honor, his family, his life, leaves John Gabriel still true to his visions.

*Borkman.* Can you see the smoke of the great steamships out on the fjord?

*Ella Rentheim.* No.

*Borkman.* I can. They come and they go. They weave a network of fellowship all round the world. They shed light and warmth over the souls of men in many thousands of homes. That was what I dreamed of doing. . . . And hark, down by the river, dear! The factories are working! *My* factories! All those that I would have created! Listen! Do you hear them humming? The night shift is on — so they are working night and day. Hark! hark! The wheels are whirling and the bands are flashing — round and round and round. Can't you hear, Ella?

*Ella Rentheim.* No.

*Borkman.* I can hear it.<sup>3</sup>

He clings to his life-saving lie. With him it has been a steady process of make-believe which now serves him as

<sup>1</sup> Vol. XI, p. 268.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316 f.

an arcanum against utter despair. His day will, must, come again. The world's work cannot go on without him. For eight years he has been pacing the floor of the room he never leaves, ceremoniously dressed to receive an imaginary delegation that must arrive sooner or later to beg him to resume his leadership, and practicing his condescending speech of acceptance. Even in that last conversation with his sister-in-law, just before the final break-down comes, the richly poetical quality of his madness reveals itself by a hallucination.

The situation of the hero between two contrastingly charactered women, the one devoted and full of understanding, the other selfish and unsympathetic, is here dealt with in a doubly powerful way. In the time that is long past, Borkman chose between two sisters, exactly as Bernick had chosen. He selfishly married the unloved one, who on her part married him not from love, but because of his promising career. By this he wrecked the lives of both sisters. Out of the unhealed old conflict between them a hateful contest now arises for the possession of John Gabriel's only child. The mutual hatred of the two sisters lasts while there remains any object to fight for. Only when John Gabriel is dead and young Erhart gone for good, is there a prospect of peace between them. The tragic fate of John Gabriel's wife evokes a vivid memory of Mrs. Alving, although the two characters are in no way alike. Gunhild Borkman is not supported by a noble stoicism in her grief. Her temper of mind is hard, loveless, unforgiving. She hates her husband grimly for the wrong he has done. Even her affection for Erhart is not pure mother-love, although she idolizes him. He is

her one hope in life; the consecrated instrument of rehabilitation who will raise up the fallen fortunes of his house — like another Hjalmar Ekdal — and make resplendent once more the darkened lustre of his name. This is to be Erhart's mission in life. When her sister's plans for Erhart threaten to cross her sacred purpose, she fights like a tigress for her young. Finally, rather than cede him to the rival, each sister abandons her claims to an adventuress. The mother's hope is cruelly shattered because Erhart happens to be an idle, pleasure-loving egoist bent on "enjoying life," and brusquely rejects the life task assigned to him. "Good Heavens, mother, I am young, after all!" "I cannot consecrate my life to making atonement for another. . . . I am young! I want to live, for once in a way, as well as other people! I want to live my own life."<sup>1</sup> So he deserts his mother, and his aunt as well, declaring himself unable to endure their stifling existence, and runs away with Mrs. Wilton, a beauty in her thirties, rich and dashing, of great unrestraint of manner and conduct. Her character is left rather undetermined in the play, but her worldly wisdom is to be inferred from the fact that she takes little Frida Foldal along in her elopement as a reserve kept for all emergencies, in case her own already fully ripened charms should lose their appeal to the object of her affections.

One might point out a number of interesting antithetical connections between the occurrences and situations in this play and those that preceded; all tending to show the poet's care not to neglect any aspect of his problems. To give an instance: In *Little Eyolf* the exclusive

<sup>1</sup> Vol. XI, pp. 279 and 283.



object of a woman's love was her husband; to the child she was worse than indifferent. In *John Gabriel Borkman* the husband is shut out from the heart of his wife; whatever love she is capable of centres on the child. But one such connection seems so important that it should certainly have been noticed by expounders of Ibsen: I mean the relation of *John Gabriel Borkman* to *A Doll's House*. The connecting thought is almost self-evident to those familiar with the way Ibsen formulates his leading ideas. Nora Helmer was at one time in danger of being punished for an offense against the criminal code. Suppose she had gone to prison, how would Torvald have behaved? And how would Nora herself have acted, — or some other woman in her place, — had the case been reversed and the husband been the offender? The question being an experimental one, the experiment is forthwith instituted. We readily surmise that Nora herself would have uttered a sentiment like Ella Rentheim's: "If I could have stood at your side when the crash came. . . . Trust me, I should have borne it all so gladly along with you. The shame, the ruin — I would have helped you to bear it all!"<sup>1</sup> She would have been one of those firm of faith whom the heroes of Ibsen need in order to believe in themselves, e.g., Skule, Stockmann, Solness. The further pursuit of this dialogue reveals an old conviction, here stated with stupendous emphasis and pushed to a still further length in Ibsen's next and final tragedy.

*Borkman.* Would you have had the will — the strength?

*Ella Rentheim.* Both the will and the strength. For then I did not know of your great, your terrible crime.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. XI, p. 245.

*Borkman.* What crime? What are you speaking of?

*Ella.* I am speaking of that crime for which there is no forgiveness.

*Borkman.* You must be out of your mind.

*Ella.* You are a murderer! You have committed the one mortal sin!

*Borkman.* You are raving, Ella!

*Ella.* You have killed the love-life in me. Do you understand what that means? The Bible speaks of a mysterious sin for which there is no forgiveness. I have never understood what it could be; but now I understand. The great, unpardonable sin is to murder the love-life in a human soul.<sup>1</sup>

About the dramatic merits of *John Gabriel Borkman* there is considerable difference of opinion. A majority of the critics claimed to notice in it a deplorable abatement of the creative power. Some even undertook to predict that the poet was nearing the end of his productivity, — not a startling prophecy, considering that he had attained the age of sixty-eight. While it is true that *John Gabriel Borkman* has not held the stage as have some of the older works, this need not be stated as an unanswerable proof of its artistic inferiority. Anybody who takes the trouble to examine narrowly the details of its structure and portraiture will be willing to subscribe to the opinion that *John Gabriel Borkman* stands in the front rank of modern masterpieces of the drama, and that among Ibsen's works it is equaled by few and unexcelled by any. In defense of such seemingly extravagant praise some of the excelling features of the piece should be mentioned in passing. The intense effect of this drama is obtained by the simplest imaginable means. Not in a

<sup>1</sup> Vol. XI, p. 246.

single instance is the aid of extraneous contrivances invoked. The characters are driven by their own motive power, and that at an unslackened speed. Plot and underplot, what little there is of the latter, are inseparably welded into one. No simpler mode of carrying the action forward could be devised than is here employed: each of the four acts merely takes up the thread where it was cut by the drop of the curtain, the entire transaction occupying about three hours. The verisimilitude is conscientiously guarded. The characters are thoroughly vitalized. Nothing that verges on the supernatural occurs in this play, and the improbable never happens; yet all these elements of the commonplace conspire to produce a tremendous tragical effect. *John Gabriel Borkman* can easily dispense with a commentary. Its meaning rings forth deep and clear and simple.

Of course one can also pick flaws in this masterpiece, as in any; but these seem trifling by comparison with its general superiority. Mr. Archer discerns unmistakable traces of change of plan. "The first two acts laid the foundation for a larger and more complex superstructure than is ultimately erected. Ibsen seems to have designed that Hinkel, the man who "betrayed," Borkman in the past, should play some efficient part in the alienation of Erhart from his family and home."<sup>1</sup> But this objection is not well founded. In drama of the realistic sort a lightly suggested line of action need not necessarily be developed. We are, for instance, left in the dark as to the force of Hinkel's reason for dealing Borkman the evil blow. So why should we have to know particulars about the rôle he

<sup>1</sup> Vol. XI, p. XXI.

plays in estranging Erhart from his parents? As though the characters of the parents and their mutual relations were not enough to account for the estrangement! Several other lines besides this bit of by-play were likewise only "sketched in": Mrs. Wilton's past, her whole character, in fact, is left to our inference. Erhart's feelings for Frida, Frida's state of mind, the outcome of the marriage — what do we know of these things? But what, forsooth, need we know about them? The dramatic centre of gravity lies wholly outside their orbits.

## CHAPTER XIX

### WHEN WE DEAD AWAKEN — SUMMARY

WE come to the final monument of Ibsen's genius. At first he named this last work forebodingly *A Dramatic Epilogue* ("En Dramatisk Epilog"), and in his correspondence he regularly refers to it as the *Epilogue*. Whether his mind was bent on a final summing-up of all his work when this play was undertaken, or whether the hope of a new phase of poetic activity hovered before his vision, we have no positive means of deciding. The drama was published near the end of 1899 under the romantically expressive title: *When We Dead Awaken* ("Naar vi doede vaagner").<sup>a</sup> Despite his advanced years, Ibsen felt hardy enough in mind and body to be thinking of still further dramatic enterprises. Several months after the publication of the *Epilogue* he hinted broadly in a letter that another artistic project was agitating him. "I do not imagine that I shall be able to keep permanently away from the old battle-fields. However, if I were to make my appearance again, it would be with new weapons, and in new armor."<sup>1</sup> Precisely what he may have meant must remain a secret. Possibly his English editor is right in assuming that Ibsen was planning a metrical play — he had said to Professor Herford a long time before that he hoped to wind up his work with a drama in verse. Perhaps he was through with all forms of artistic realism; a revulsion to the idealis-

<sup>1</sup> C, p. 327.



tic conception of the drama would have found the literary world not altogether unprepared, after the streams of pronouncedly romantic tendency manifest in the symbolical plays.

For its personal interest, namely, as a grand poetical confession, as the epitome of a great artist's strenuous and lifelong struggle, and the expression of a long-hoarded philosophy of life, this play stands supreme. Moreover, it contains portions artistically exquisite, full of surpassing lyric beauty; and for brief moments the intuitive and unerring vision of the born dramatist, the force and power of the practiced master of stage effect unequivocally reassert themselves. Yet judged in its entirety, *When We Dead Awaken* is not on a plane with Ibsen's best creations. As a stage piece it is lessened in strength by a lack of that admirable balance between outer truth and deeper meaning which characterized the social problem plays. It is difficult to repress a feeling that the persons in this drama behave somewhat like marionettes, and yet that, in the words of Sculptor Rubek, "there is something equivocal, something cryptic, lurking in and behind these busts." I have expressed in an earlier connection a belief that certain peculiarities of Ibsen's symbolistic method have had a notable influence upon the work of Maurice Maeterlinck. Ibsen's great Belgian disciple, however, went, in special instances, far beyond his master, so that his studied effects frequently border on mannerism. Particularly is this true of Maeterlinck's dramatic dialogue, with its almost infantile simplicity, and of the outer bearing of the *dramatis personæ*, now so shadowy and uncanny as to sug-

<sup>1</sup> Vol. XI, p. 338.

gest visitors from another planet, now so mechanical in speech and gesture as to appear like animated automations. It seems that after Maeterlinck's style had been fully developed, the master in his turn fell under the influence of the pupil. In the *Epilogue*, nearly all important figures thus bear the Belgian's *marque de fabrique*; the wan, silent Sister of Mercy as well as Irene, weird in speech and gesture, in form tall, slender, and emaciated like some pre-Raphaelite portrait; the uncouth bear hunter, less man than satyr, and the lusty, reckless little Maja, both of them frankly the slaves of their senses, yet nevertheless refined into a sheer extramundane semblance. But whereas Maeterlinck, in his subtilized quasi-puppet plays, — even when the presentment happens to be couched in terms of ordinary facts of life, as in *L'Intruse* or in *L'Intérieur*, — comes to the aid of our imagination by plain hintings of supernatural interferences, such hints are absent from a play like *When We Dead Awaken*, and consequently the spectator is both greatly mystified and tantalized. This makes the *Epilogue* a failure as a play. Viewed, on the other hand, not as a mere theatric entertainment, but as Ibsen's *apologia pro vita sua* before an audience of initiates, it becomes a great human document that bears an unmistakable impress of truth. Of course, no sillier blunder could be made than to attempt, by means of biographical excavations, to cover the movement of the play step by step with data from the poet's personal history.

In general, however, we may acquiesce in the simple equation that Professor Rubek is identical with Henrik Ibsen. There is much outer and still more inner evidence

of this. In the early exposition of the play, Rubek explains why he does not feel quite happy in his native country, to which he has just returned. "I have perhaps been too long abroad, I have drifted quite away from this — this home life."<sup>1</sup> In words closely corresponding with this sentiment, Ibsen in a private letter lamented his inability to renaturalize himself in Norway. "Oh, dear Brandes, it is not without its consequences that a man lives for twenty-seven years in the wider, emancipated, and emancipating spiritual conditions of the great world. Up here, by the fjords, is my native land. But — but — but! Where am I to find my home-land?"<sup>2</sup> Maja's remarks about Rubek's restlessness, "You have begun to wander about without a moment's peace. You cannot rest anywhere, neither at home nor abroad. You have become quite misanthropic of late,"<sup>3</sup> apply with the same force to the poet's own homelessness and his migratory habits. In the play, Rubek has lost the power to work; it is as though herein lay a prediction of the sad fate that was to overtake the poet. Turning to a still surer criterion, could there be a more trustworthy index to Ibsen's skeptical feelings about the popular appreciation of his works than the following bit of colloquy?

*Maja.* Why, Rubek, — all the world knows that it [*The Resurrection*] is a masterpiece!

*Professor Rubek.* All the world knows nothing!

*Maja.* Well, at any rate, it can divine something.

*Rubek.* Something that is n't there at all, yes. Something that never was in my mind. Ah, yes, that they can all go into ecstasies over! (*Growling to himself.*) What is the good of

<sup>1</sup> Vol. XI, p. 329.

<sup>2</sup> C, p. 447.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. XI, p. 335.

working one's self to death for the mob and the masses, — for "all the world"! <sup>1</sup>

The true analogy between Rubek and Ibsen that is hinted in the inward discontent of the sculptor has to do with the eternal question as to the relative satisfactions of work and pleasure. Rubek's repudiation of his art is dictated by the characteristic despondency of a great man in his decline, the poignant grief of a creative artist whose power is on the wane. And that great artist was Ibsen himself. The works of his last decade were pervaded by a tone of resignation and regret.

*Rubek.* All the talk about the artist's vocation and the artist's mission, and so forth, began to strike me as being very empty, and hollow, and meaningless at bottom.

*Maja.* Then, what would you put in its place?

*Rubek.* Life, Maja. <sup>2</sup>

*When We Dead Awaken*, as a postlude to Ibsen's life-work, interweaves nearly all the leading *motifs* by which his life and work were governed. But through the maze of harmonies a final melody rings clearly forth — the plaintive query: What shall it profit a man to enrich the whole world if by so doing he pauperize himself?

It is, then, in a symbolical aspect that the persons of this play have to be viewed, and this is especially true of the great sculptor and his model. Nothing could be more irrelevant and improper than to push the biographical parallel so far as to seek evidence, for example, of some unconsummated love affair in the life of Ibsen. It is due to say that his marriage was so thoroughly happy that he prized it as the one true fortune life had borne him.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. xi, p. 336 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 396.

Emil Reich, whose opinion on any matter connected with Ibsen is worth noting, observes well that, in *When We Dead Awaken*, Ibsen spoke his final word on the woman question. The theme here resumed is that of a self-conscious woman who is treated by the man she loves as a piece of property instead of as a personality. Hebbel's *Herodes und Mariamne* and his *Gyges und sein Ring* are devoted to the same problem in dramatized psychology. Irene's life was sacrificed by Rubek, for although he loved her as a man loves a woman, he repressed his feelings and used her solely as the tool of his artistic ambition. An image of virginal purity was to be wrought, and the model must be of immaculate innocence. Irene exposed unreservedly the stainless radiance of her beauty; however, she did it not for the good of art in the abstract, but for love of the man in the artist.

*Irene.* You did wrong to my innermost, inborn nature.

*Professor Rubek (starting back).* I —

*Irene.* Yes, you! I exposed myself wholly and unreservedly to your gaze — and never once did you touch me.

*Professor Rubek.* Irene, did you not understand that many a time I was almost beside myself under the spell of all your loveliness?

*Irene.* And yet if you had touched me, I think I should have killed you on the spot.<sup>1</sup>

Rubek's one real chance of happiness was with Irene. But the turning-point of his fortune was allowed to slip by unused. That was when their "child," the statue, was finished. Irene, now at last expected to be his, the mother of his children in the flesh and blood. But she was honor-

<sup>1</sup> Vol. XI, p. 370 f. This psychologically so well-studied situation is, in a way, a repetition from *Hedda Gabler*.



ably dismissed with a cool word of thanks: "I thank you, Irene. This has been a priceless episode for me."<sup>1</sup> Thus she passed out of his life. Her entire personality was swept away by the loss of her love. She now hates Arnold's art — as Rita in *Little Eyolf* hates Alfred's studies — because it has killed her "love-life." Revenge on Rubek is vicariously wrought through retribution meted out to men in general. Emotionally long dead, she eventually loses her reason, her fixed delusion being that she is dead. Half-cured from her insanity, she meets Rubek again.

For Arnold Rubek, on the other hand, Art lost its meaning when Irene left. Professor Grumann offers an extremely tempting interpretation of Rubek's separation from Irene. She was Rubek's highest art ideal. In him, then, we have the artist who at first lives up to the highest demands of his ideals. Rubek casts Irene aside, and her character degenerates. Clearly the conception is that an ideal degenerates when it is forsaken.<sup>b</sup> Rubek's ambition has ceased to soar; he attempts only petty things; and when he portrays human beings, he presents them sarcastically in animal masks, that being the way he has come to know them. With the inspirations of art gone, Rubek's existence becomes dull and empty. So he makes a belated attempt to "live." Since he can "afford" a beautiful villa and extensive traveling, he humors himself still further by purchasing a companion for his enjoyments. His young wife's name is Maja, which in Indian means the Life-Bearing or Fertile, or — in another connotation — the falseness and hollowness of the external

<sup>1</sup> Vol. XI, p. 420.

world. The unintelligent, vacuous little Maja bores him as much as he bores her. Both are sighing for relief. She is far better suited to Ulfheim, whose grossly physical attractiveness appeals to her unspiritualized senses. This votary of fleshly joys acts, in a sort, as a "pendant" not only of Maja, but also of Irene. Having been betrayed by one woman, he would revenge himself by seeking to betray all women. His sensuality is not without a certain glamour of poetry, which is shown in striking contrast to Little Maja's matter-of-factness when he refers to his somewhat primitive *buen retiro* in the woods as a hunting-castle where princesses have dwelt in bliss, and she curtly names it an old pigsty. Ulfheim is a species of Wild Huntsman, who, unlike his kinsman the Flying Dutchman of Heinrich Heine and Richard Wagner, can attain his salvation only through the woman that *denies* herself to him. A significant difference marks the coming together of the two couples. Maja enters lightheartedly into an escapade with the mighty killer of bears. He frees her from her misadventurous union with Rubek; and when up in the mountains their lives are imperiled, Ulfheim and Maja seek safety by quick descent to the lowlands, where existences like theirs best thrive. Irene, on the other hand, is reawakened from death to the realization of life's utmost possibilities when Rubek at last reaches out for her possession. Together their wasted lives reattain a higher meaning. Like John Gabriel Borkman and Ella Rentheim, they ascend the mountain hand in hand, and are buried, like Brand, under a falling avalanche.

For the forcefulness of the idea that is central in *When We Dead Awaken* it is not material whether the plaint

of a misspent life is fully grounded in the poet's own experience. The fundamental question is: Is a life of toil worth the living, and is not success, even supreme achievement, too dearly bought at the cost of happiness? Whilst the great worker labors and suffers in isolation, does not the common life go on relentlessly, careless of his reveries and aspirations? And is it not, after all, the part of wisdom to heed the Mephistophelian advice: —

My worthy friend, gray are all theories,  
And green alone Life's golden tree.

In his earliest poems Ibsen again and again raises the question whether the poet's dreams will ever become reality. Once, in *Paa Vidderne*, the contrast is sharply stated between an artistic conception of life and life itself in its concrete reality.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps, then, all life in the abstract spheres of science, art, and religion is unreal? And here, at the close of his career, made wise by great achievements and still greater disillusionments, Ibsen's last message would seem to be: Whoever has lived only for his art has never attained to real happiness, nay, has never really lived. Is it the poet's or the man's despair that moved the confession? The *life* that has not been *lived* — unquestionably this is the burden of this *confessio poetæ*. It implies certainly a recoil from idealism, if it means nothing more than that the real joys of life are those smaller satisfactions which the man of exceptional endowment is compelled to forego. But even in his decline a man of Ibsen's stamp is hardly to be thought of as steeped in such petty regrets. The great artist is not liable to forget so utterly the fact that to be an artist is

<sup>1</sup> *SW*, pp. 90-104; *M*, vol. III, pp. 42-54.

to spend and transmute much of one's common share in human happiness into less tangible but higher values. Ibsen expended his tremendous capacity for living in the artistic work to which his entire life was devoted.

Yet it may be, on the other hand, that the aging revolutionary, in a retrospect over his public career, accused himself of a radical inconsistency. He had conceived and advocated theories of life which perhaps he lacked the courage to practice — forms of happiness perchance which he was too timid to grasp.<sup>c</sup> In spirit a rebel and innovator, he was in conduct prudent and conservative. Once, replying to the inquiry of a certain debating society in regard to the meaning of *Rosmersholm*, he pointed out as one of its leading *motifs* the clash that occurs in every serious life between conduct and insight. Man's acquisitive power makes him progressive, while his conscience, being the residuum of past traditions, tends to make him conservative.<sup>1</sup>

Be that as it may, where Rubek tells the story of his master effort, every line is fraught with personal allusion, and in this story Ibsen has undoubtedly bequeathed to us an epitome of his artistic *curriculum vitæ*. As originally conceived, the master work was to be a supreme embodiment of purity and beauty represented by a woman of sublime nobility of form and mien.

I was young then — with no knowledge of life. The Resurrection, I thought, would be most beautifully and exquisitely figured as a young, unsullied woman, — with none of our earth-life's experiences, — awakening to light and glory without having to put away from her anything ugly and impure.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> C, p. 412 f.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. xi, p. 415.

After Irene passed out of his life, that concept of the wakening beauty wondering at its own loveliness soon made room for another. The reason for the altered position of the central figure, at first intended to stand alone but now surrounded by many others, lay in a wider knowledge of life.

I learned worldly wisdom in the years that followed. The Resurrection Day became in my mind's eye something more — and something — something more complex. The little round plinth on which your figure stood erect and solitary — it no longer afforded room for all the imagery I now wanted to add. . . . I imaged that which I saw with my eyes around me in the world. I had to include it — I could not help it. I expanded the plinth — made it wide and spacious. And on it I placed a segment of the curving, bursting earth. And up from the fissures of the soil there now swarm men and women with dimly suggested animal faces. Women and men as I knew them in real life.<sup>1</sup>

The transition from the romantic to the satirical plays is hinted here, and in order to leave not a trace of doubt about the underlying reference of the whole story to Ibsen's artistic career, Ibsen has made Rubek carve his own figure as that of a man who is weighed down with guilt and who cannot quite free himself from the earth-crust. Unquestionably Ibsen subjected his works, in this final review, to a pitiless criticism.

Those readers of Ibsen who regard the works of his Roman period, *Brand*, *Peer Gynt*, and possibly also *Emperor and Galilean*, as the greatest performances of his genius, may if they choose point to the poet's self-estimate as to a court of final appeal. Moved by his regret over the abandonment of pure idealism, they over-

<sup>1</sup> Vol. XI, p. 416.



look the inner compulsion that wrought the change, and fail to catch Rubek's apology, "I imaged that which I saw with my eyes around me in the world. I had to include it — I could not help it." Already in 1874, Ibsen, addressing the Norwegian students come to bid him welcome, declared: —

I have written about those things which, so to speak, stood higher than my daily self, and I have done so in order to settle them, both outside and within myself. But I have also written about the opposite things, those which to an introspective contemplation appear as the dregs and sediments of one's own nature. The work of writing has in this case been to me like a bath which I felt I was leaving cleaner, healthier, and freer.<sup>1</sup>

As the number of subsidiary figures kept increasing, the sculptor had to widen his plinth; and for the sake of a properly proportioned arrangement, the ideal form that once in solitary grandeur occupied the centre was moved somewhat into the background.<sup>d</sup> Even so idealism with the poet was not permitted to overshadow all the facts of life. The transfiguring expression of joy that once glorified the statue's countenance was later subdued, in order to be brought into harmony with the enlarged purpose; for the aggregate idea of the group, as stated so tersely by Irene, was very comprehensive: "The statue represents life as you see it now."

Looking back over the three periods of Henrik Ibsen's poetical activity, we are once more constrained to set aside the judgment of the bitterly disenchanted poet, and to insist, in conscious contradiction of the prevailing

<sup>1</sup> *SNL*, p. 50.

opinion,<sup>6</sup> that his title to his fame, which is now international and, if signs deceive not, deathless, reposes not so much on the exuberantly imaginative works of his early career, as on the so-called social plays of his later periods. We may include under this larger definition the full dozen of dramas from *Pillars of Society* to *When We Dead Awaken*. The first six, *Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of the People*, *The Wild Duck*, and *Rosmersholm*, are revolutionary, directed polemically against the government of human society as at present organized. The other six, *The Lady from the Sea*, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Master Builder*, *Little Eyolf*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, and the *Dramatic Epilogue*, are primarily and principally devoted to the psychological analysis of individual character. The general trend of the social ethics in this long series of plays is seen to mark a transition from aimless attack upon the extant order to unqualified exaltation of the individual, and a further progress thence to a plea for socialized liberty.

Throughout this imposing series of monumental works of art, Ibsen proves himself an artist of the first magnitude. Sufficient has been said in these pages about Ibsen's originality; his work is strikingly his own. The soundness of his methods has likewise been enough dwelt upon. The final secret of his technique is that its raw materials are the passions and wills of human beings, that, in the words of the philosopher Protagoras, "Man is the measure of all things." Pointing to the sum of his technical achievements, it is not too much to call him the creator of a new form of the drama.

But Ibsen was not only a great dramatic poet. How-

ever we may differ from his views, we must admit that he was also an eminent factor in the culture of our age. He was an indefatigable student of living problems, envisaging them with his own clear-sighted eyes, not through the tarnished spectacles of the past, and enforcing for them the serious attention of the thinking world. To an age that is pregnant with new socio-ethical departures he rendered an incalculable service, in that he brought into strongest relief the intellectual tendencies of his time as they struggled to the surface of the social consciousness.

His popularity must needs suffer from the fact that concealment or even caution was absent from the character of his work and that he did not belong to the literary prettifiers of the stern facts of life. Standing preëminent in thoughts other than those of the multitude, he contributed more slowly, none the less surely, his share to the creation of a new social order. He, first among modern dramatists, recognized evolution as the new organon of human knowledge and conduct, and, consequently, the determining influence of environment upon human character. Therefore he pleaded more consistently than any other writer for the necessity of social readjustments; by doing this, he has aroused more controversy than perhaps any writer in history. Yet his thorough belief in heredity did not make of Ibsen an out-and-out determinist. To him the fundamental question remained: In a world pre-ordained by necessity, how far extends the responsibility of man as an individual and man in the aggregate?

His plays are no mere satires upon the social world. Their influence is ever bent towards higher, truer, and more potent aspirations. A realist in most of his methods,

Ibsen is by impulse and outlook an idealist, almost a visionary. And since without vision there could be no future, he is emphatically the poet of the future, and herein lies his power to influence the best minds of the present. He offered the people of his generation not what they wanted, but what he knew they needed. He strove for the approval of the very best among them, and that is why so many leading spirits of this era trace their maturity from his influence.

Ibsen's work at first was relished by very few, but the rapidly increasing numbers now joining in the demand for it bear gratifying testimony to the educability of a public when once a truly great teacher obtains a hearing. Those of us who believe in the stage as a real and very important factor in civilization can only hope that sometime in the near future such a master may appear in the English-speaking world to show us how the facts and situations of our lives, rightly and seriously regarded, may prove a lever of social and intellectual progress. For no modern nation may be called completely civilized without a serious and artistically significant drama of its contemporary life.

THE END

## NOTES





# NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

<sup>a</sup> WITNESS a contemporary English observer noted for the moderation of his views: "One of the reasons why we are so unintellectual, so conventional, so commonplace a nation is because we do not care for ideas, we do not admire originality, we do not want to be made to think and feel; what we admire is success and respectability." (A. C. Benson, *The Silent Isle*, p. 375.)

<sup>b</sup> Ibsen was a disbeliever in the stability of moral ideals. He declared in so many words that conscience is not a fixed human value. It varies with the individual and the epoch. The struggle between parties is a struggle between out-of-date consciences and new consciences. (*SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, p. 208.)

<sup>c</sup> *Constrained Attitudes*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1910; pp. 58-59.

## CHAPTER I

<sup>a</sup> The most active among the original advocates of *Landsmaal*, according to some authorities the real originator of the movement, was the philologist Ivan Andreas Aasen (1813-1896). The most prominent poet who made use of it was Aasmund Olafsen Vinje (1818-1870). To balance the relative merits of the two forms of language is not an easy matter. For the present phase of the contest cf. Calvin Thomas, "Recent Progress of the Landsmaal Movement in Norway," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. xxv, no. 3, pp. 367-68.

<sup>b</sup> Ibsen was luminously conscious of the interdependence between poetry and the national uplift. In a prologue composed for the anniversary celebration of the Norwegian Theatre at Christiania, January 2, 1852, this sentiment is enunciated:—

Art and the Folk must jointly onward stride,  
Else Art might easily seem an alien impulse  
Whose forces man nor grasps nor recognizes.

(*SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, p. 64.)

<sup>c</sup> On the relation of the two works cf. A. M. Sturtevant, "Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* and *Paa Vidderne*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. ix, no. 1, pp. 43 ff.

## CHAPTER II

<sup>a</sup> Our chief source of information, apart from the poet's own letters, are the reports of personal friends. Ibsen was a copious correspondent, and many of his letters to notable persons are preserved in the original, as also in the German and English editions of his correspondence. Of letters addressed to him, however, none have so far been made available for the student. The life of Ibsen has been treated with satisfactory fullness and accuracy; especially so by Henrik Jaeger, Edmund Gosse, Roman Woerner, and Montrose J. Moses. Ibsen long cherished the plan of writing his own recollections, at least of the earlier part of his life. In 1881 he mentioned the plan of a book *From Skien to Rome*; cf. *C*, p. 346. Again at a banquet tendered him at Christiania in 1898 he spoke of the intention; cf. *SNL*, p. 58. But the project never got beyond the beginnings. The brief fragment actually written is found in *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. I, pp. 198-205, under the title "Recollections of My Childhood."

<sup>b</sup> Gosse, p. 24.

<sup>c</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>d</sup> *Lady Inger of Østraat* was written in 1854 and first performed at Bergen, January 2, 1855. In 1857 it was printed, in a very small edition. The definitive edition, not greatly altered, came out in 1874.

<sup>e</sup> The history of Ibsen's connection with the Bergen Theatre is rehearsed by William Archer in "Ibsen's Apprenticeship," *Fortnightly Review*, vol. LXXV, n. s. January, 1904, pp. 25-35.

<sup>f</sup> For a capital description cf. Edgar Steiger, *Das Werden des neuen Dramas*, p. 125.

<sup>g</sup> Cf. Christian Collin, "Henrik Ibsen und Norwegen," *Die neue Rundschau*, 1907, pp. 1281-1302. Cf. especially p. 1301.

<sup>h</sup> Among English writers who have given somewhat detailed attention to Ibsen's metrical works, the Rev. Philip Wicksteed deserves special mention. *Four Lectures on Henrik Ibsen*. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1892.

<sup>i</sup> Haldane Macfall, *Henrik Ibsen; The Man, His Art, and His Significance*, p. 45.

<sup>j</sup> The symbolism of *Sankthansnatten* is discussed by J. Lescoffier in *Revue Germanique*, 1905, pp. 298-306.

## CHAPTER III

<sup>a</sup> For completer data of the stage history of Ibsen's plays and the printed editions cf. Halvorsen, Reich, Woerner, Kildal, Moses (see

Selected List of Publications on Henrik Ibsen); the data may also be gathered from Archer's introductions to *CW*.

<sup>b</sup> *Norske Folkeviser*, 1858. Under a similar title, *Norske Folkeviser og Stev*, Jørgen J. Moe had previously published his collection in 1840; he followed this up with a collection of fairy tales in 1842. Another such was published by Peter Christian Asbjørnsen in 1854.

<sup>c</sup> Like *The Night of St. John* it was at first barred by Ibsen from the collected works. Now, however, it is available in *Efterl. Skrifter*; also in *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. II, pp. 217-322.

<sup>d</sup> Vol. I, p. 189 f.

<sup>e</sup> Whereas Ibsen in his essay on the *Kaempvise*, which was written earlier than *The Vikings*, still held the opposite view.

<sup>f</sup> Kipling, *La Nuit Blanche*.

<sup>g</sup> Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Die Lieder des Mirza-Schaffy*:—

Höre was der Volksmund spricht:  
Wer die Wahrheit liebt, der muss  
Schon sein Pferd am Zügel haben —  
Wer die Wahrheit denkt, der muss  
Schon den Fuss im Bügel haben —  
Wer die Wahrheit spricht, der muss  
Statt der Arme Flügel haben!  
Und doch singt Mirza-Schaffy:  
Wer da lügt, muss Prügel haben!

<sup>h</sup> Woerner, vol. II, p. 13.

<sup>i</sup> Macfall, p. 88.

#### CHAPTER IV

<sup>a</sup> Cf. Steiger, *op. cit.*, p. 128 f.

<sup>b</sup> Brandes in *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. IV, p. ix, declares *Brand* to have been a continuation of the lifework of Søren Kierkegaard and Frederik Paludan-Mueller (1809-1876). Ibsen denied Kierkegaard's influence. Cf. *C*, pp. 119 and 119 note 1, 136, and 199.

<sup>c</sup> Cf. F. W. Horn, *Geschichte der Literatur des skandinavischen Nordens*, Leipsic, 1880, p. 259. Kierkegaard's principal works were: *Om Begrebet Ironi* ("On the Meaning of Irony"); *Enten-Eller* ("Either-Or"); *Stadier paa Livets Vei* ("Stages in the Journey of Life"). He was also the author of numerous pamphlets, often keenly polemical in tone, in which he made vehement propaganda for his views.

<sup>d</sup> New York: Scribners; p. 171.

<sup>c</sup> Cf. for the following paragraph the *Life of Ibsen*, by Henrik Jaeger, transl. by Clara Bell.

<sup>f</sup> Agnes is a prototype of Nora in *A Doll's House*, not only in respect to this relation, but also in her unquenchable will. She leaves Einar much as Nora parts from Helmer, because of her disappointment that from him the "miracle" may never be expected. Einar, too, the man of fine phrase and pretty sentiment, is a forerunner, — namely, of Hilmar Tønnesen (*Pillars of Society*). The same type of character is raised to the power of caricature in Hjalmar Ekdal (*The Wild Duck*).

<sup>g</sup> A milder form of the disease is common among children of imaginative temper. Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn had a good attack of the malady. Mr. Archer quotes from Asbjørnsen's *Norske Huldre-eventyr og Folkesagn*: "Peer Gynt was such an out-and-out tale-maker and yarn-spinner, you could n't have helped laughing at him. He always made out that he himself had been mixed up in all the stories that people said had happened in the olden time." Vol. iv, p. 278.

<sup>h</sup> On "Maalstraev" cf. chapter I, note a. The movement to substitute, in Norway, for the use of Danish as a literary medium a "Schriftsprache" made up from native dialects has made considerable headway. "Landsmaal" is taught in the schools and spoken in Storthing. Ibsen's works are in the classic Danish, modified, however, by many Norwegianisms.

<sup>i</sup> L. Passarge's introduction in Reclam's *Universalbibliothek*, p. 8.

<sup>j</sup> The first German version, by L. Passarge, was published in 1881. Other nations gave slower welcome to *Peer Gynt*. An English rendering, by William and Charles Archer, appeared in 1892. Not till 1896 was the play done into French, — by Count Prozor, in the *Nouvelle Revue*. It was performed the same year in Paris; the American production was undertaken in 1906, by Mr. Richard Mansfield.

## CHAPTER V

<sup>a</sup> The changeful personal relations of Ibsen and Bjørnson are lucidly reviewed by Lee M. Hollander in the introduction to *SNL*, pp. 20–25.

<sup>b</sup> *Love's Labor's Lost*, Act I, Sc. 1, l. 166 f.

<sup>c</sup> It is characteristic for the peculiar temper of Ibsen that the effect of Italy was to stimulate his philosophical and critical intelligence rather than his æsthetic sense. The wonders of ancient art struck the disciple of northern Helleno-romanticism as conventional and lacking in character. He preferred the Gothic style of architecture; hence the *Duomo*



at Milan pleased and satisfied him more than any other building. Cf. C, p. 78.

<sup>d</sup> Arno Scheunert, *Der Pantragismus als System der Weltanschauung und Ästhetik Friedrich Hebbels*. Hamburg and Leipsic: Voss, 1903.

<sup>e</sup> First written down in 1881; published in 1897 in vol. XII of the *Works*, edited by Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche.

<sup>f</sup> In his drama *Der Meister von Palmyra* (1890), Adolf Wilbrandt has ventured to present his hero in a series of reincarnations. The same idea is carried out in some of the epic and dramatic versions of the legend about the Wandering Jew.

<sup>g</sup> The first performance was given at the Stadttheater in Leipsic, December 5, 1896. In Berlin it was given in March, 1898; in Christiania not till 1903, and then only Part First.

<sup>h</sup> After *Emperor and Galilean* Ibsen freed himself energetically for a time from the hold that mysticism was gaining on him. But from *The Master Builder* on he succumbed again, and that irredeemably.

## CHAPTER VI

<sup>a</sup> The first of Brandes's penetrating essays on Ibsen was contained in the *Aesthetiske Studier*, 1868.

<sup>b</sup> Professor Josef Wiehr, *Hebbel und Ibsen*, Stuttgart, 1908, p. 8, says that Ibsen "did not find, as did Hebbel, the magic formula that might have revealed to him the meaning of life." That much is true. But I cannot assign the reason for it, with this author, to Ibsen's "extraordinary many-sidedness."

<sup>c</sup> On this point the utterance of a thoughtful Englishman (who happens to be the son of an Archbishop of Canterbury) is of interest: "All that later theologians can do, when the old doctrine is exploded, is to prove that the doctrine can be modified and held in some philosophical or metaphysical sense that was certainly not in the least degree contemplated by the theologian who framed it." (A. C. Benson, *The Silent Isle*, p. 231.)

<sup>d</sup> In *Degeneration*, Nordau devotes about one hundred pages to the task of proving Ibsen's degeneracy.

<sup>e</sup> Both were translated by Jens Peter Jacobsen, the former in 1872, the latter in 1875.

## CHAPTER VII

<sup>a</sup> On this subject in general consult Arthur Eloesser, *Das bürgerliche Drama*, Berlin: Hertz, 1898, and Edgar Steiger, *Das Werden des neuen*

*Dramas*, pp. 125 ff. With special reference to Ibsen, cf. B. Litzmann, *Ibsens Dramen, passim*.

<sup>b</sup> Ibsen's course was the reverse.

<sup>c</sup> Preface to *Maria Magdalene*.

<sup>d</sup> *Moderne Geister* ("Det moderne Gjennerembruds Maend," 1881). The essay on Ibsen appeared first in the second edition, 1883; cf. p. 508 of the fourth German edition.

<sup>e</sup> Frank Moore Colby, *Constrained Attitudes*, p. 61.

<sup>f</sup> Ibsen had been forestalled to some extent by Björnson's *Bankruptcy* ("En Fallit," 1875). The two plays coincide in many of their social and ethical notions. Ibsen sent his drama to Björnson, from whom, as we have seen, he had been estranged for some time. Björnson, however, was not keen to reciprocate the proffered renewal of the old friendship.

<sup>g</sup> The economic Utopianisms of Consul Bernick are repeated, in an intensified form yet in part almost *verbatim*, in *John Gabriel Borkman*.

<sup>h</sup> Compare his attitude towards Auner with that of the elder Werle (*The Wild Duck*) towards the human instrument of his crime.

<sup>i</sup> As handled by the Dutch dramatist, Hermann Hejermans, in *The Good Hope* ("Op Hoop van Zegen," 1910), the grim theme proves far more stirring. Here the merchant prince actually offers up his hecatomb to mammon, with malice toward none in his heart and a pious smirk on his lips.

<sup>j</sup> *The Prodigal Son*, p. 286.

<sup>k</sup> E. E. Stoll "Anachronism in Shakespeare Criticism," *Modern Philology*, vol VII, p. 572.

<sup>l</sup> The long delay cannot even be excused with the lack of a suitable translation. An adaptation, prepared by William Archer, was presented under the title *Quicksands, or Pillars of Society*, as early as December 15, 1880, at the Old Gaiety Theatre, London. This single matinee performance remains memorable as being the first presentation of Ibsen to an English-speaking audience. But for something like ten years no publisher could be induced to print Mr. Archer's translation.

<sup>m</sup> The number is raised not inconsiderably through the publication of the *Efterladte Skrifter*. The many prologues and other poems of occasion show Ibsen to have been a facile and fertile but not notably original producer of made-to-order poetry.

<sup>n</sup> The manuscripts are for the greater part preserved in the Royal University Library at Christiania. Ibsen never expected to publish this material. "I don't want the public to discover the stupidities while

struggling to give a play the form that satisfies me." Nevertheless he kept his papers, remarking, "All this is for my son, who can do with it as he likes." And another time he admitted, "These manuscripts are important; some day they will have a great value."

<sup>o</sup> The first thoroughgoing criticism of Ibsen came from a German pen: Ludwig Passarge, *Henrik Ibsen. Ein Beitrag zur neuesten Geschichte der norwegischen Nationalliteratur*. Leipsic: Elischer, 1883. Of course, attention had been called to Ibsen before that, — in England, by Mr. Gosse in 1872. Cf. p. 103.

<sup>p</sup> Cf. Albert Dresdner, *Ibsen als Norweger und Europäer*, Jena: Diederichs, 1907, p. 34.

## CHAPTER VIII

<sup>a</sup> Golden Bottomley, *Midsummer Eve*.

<sup>b</sup> The embitterment of intellectual women over the social condition of the sex has led more than once to their denial of woman's existence as one deserving to be called human. Note, for example, Helene Böhlau's great novel *Halbtier* ("Half Brute," 1899).

<sup>c</sup> "The ideal wife is one that does everything that the ideal husband likes, and nothing else. Now to treat a person as a means instead of an end is to deny that person's right to live." Bernard Shaw, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*.

<sup>d</sup> *The Woman in White*, as published by Burt, New York, p. 561.

<sup>e</sup> Quoted in the *Literary Digest*, July 23, 1910.

<sup>f</sup> It is said that the "model" for Nora was a certain votary of fashion who forged a bill in order to raise money for re-decorating her home. The character was altered by Ibsen beyond recognition. The change took place, probably, under the inspiration received from Camilla Collett, the poetess, a sister of Henrik Wergeland. She certainly influenced greatly Ibsen's views on the woman question. Jacobine Camilla Collett (1813-1895) was the most energetic pioneer of the woman movement in Scandinavia. Her writings constitute eloquent arguments for feminine rights, in particular *Erindringer og Bekjendelser* ("Reminiscences and Confessions") and *Fra de Stummes Lejr* ("From the Camp of the Dumb"). The story of her earlier life is told in her fine narrative *I de lange Naetter* ("In the Long Nights"). Her most popular and influential novel was *Amtmandens Døtre* ("The Daughters of the Magistrate"); this undoubtedly helped to give shape to *Love's Comedy*. Cf. *SW*<sup>n</sup>, vol. iv, p. 303.

<sup>g</sup> *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, pp. 83 ff.

<sup>h</sup> Being always conscious of the connectedness of his work, Ibsen husbanded every fruitful thought and word. Cf. p. 109, note 1, also Julius Bab, "Das Ibsen-Problem," *Die neue Rundschau*, October, 1910.

<sup>i</sup> Its first impersonator in English was Helen Modjeska. Having "created" the rôle at St. Petersburg in November, 1881, she essayed it in America, under the title of *Thora* (December, 1883, at Macauley's Theatre in Louisville, Kentucky). A correcter representation was secured for the English stage by Miss Janet Achurch whose performance of Nora Mr. Bernard Shaw pronounced fifteen years afterward still the most complete artistic achievement in the "new genre."

## CHAPTER IX

<sup>a</sup> This misleading translation of the original is due to the lack of a precise vocable, in English, for *Gengangere*. The truer connotation is preserved in the French, *Les Revenants*.

<sup>b</sup> Not even this cold comfort remains, however, if Sir Walter Besant is the bearer of a true tale. In his tragi-facetious sequel to *A Doll's House*, published in the *English Illustrated Magazine* for January, 1890, under the heading *The Doll's House — and After*, things turn all to the bad. After Nora's desertion Helmer takes to drink. The son becomes a forger; the girl, who is in love with young Krogstad, ends by suicide because his father, now egregiously respectable, opposes the match on the grounds of higher social hygiene. (Ibsen, of course, dealt with the question of moral heredity with far greater artistic freedom.) — Still another ending was furnished by an American authoress, *Nora's Return. A Sequel to A Doll's House*, by Mrs. Edna Dow Cheney. Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1890. Nora becomes a trained nurse, and during a cholera epidemic saves Helmer's life a second time. The ending is conventionally happy. — While dealing with these meagre by-products of Ibsenism we might as well mention a certain parody on *Ghosts* given May 30, 1891, at Toole's Theatre in London. This saltless concoction, served up under the name of *Ibsen's Ghosts, or Toole up to Date*, and having no value except that of proving conclusively the pathetic incapacity of its author for the appreciation of serious drama, came from the pen of Mr. John Matthew Barrie.

<sup>c</sup> Walter Pritchard Eaton, in *The American Magazine*, August, 1910.

<sup>d</sup> Cf. *The Daily Telegraph*, March 14, 1891 (after the performance in Grein's "Independent Theatre"). A very adverse criticism also was that by Alfred Watson in *The Standard*.

<sup>e</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, April 8, 1891.

<sup>f</sup> p. 93 f.

<sup>g</sup> The subject is ably treated by the German alienist W. Weygandt, *Abnorme Charaktere in der dramatischen Literatur*, pp. 77-126.

<sup>h</sup> Lessing in his *Laokoon*, Schiller in the essay *Gedanken über den Gebrauch des Gemeinen und Niedrigen in der Kunst*.

## CHAPTER X

<sup>a</sup> Oscar Wilde, *Intentions: The Critic as Artist*, p. 173.

<sup>b</sup> Hermann Schlag, *Das Drama*, p. 352 *et passim*. Schlag's presentation is very closely adhered to in the following discussion. For the beginning of this chapter use has been made freely of the chapter on "Darwinismus und Schicksal" in Edgar Steiger, *Das Werden des neuen Dramas*.

<sup>c</sup> Cf. on Ibsen's technique, Emil Reich, *Henrik Ibsens Dramen*, Dresden: E. Pierson's Verlag, 1900, pp. 465 ff.

<sup>d</sup> Reich calls it the "Bravouraria."

<sup>e</sup> Cf. Emil Reich, *op. cit.*, p. 478 f.

<sup>f</sup> For good illustrations cf. Reich, p. 488.

<sup>g</sup> *Ibsen's Symbolism in The Master Builder and When We Dead Awaken*. University Studies, University of Nebraska, vol. x, no. 3, July, 1910.

<sup>h</sup> Oswald's imbecile cries, "Give me the sun, mother," are explained by Weygandt, cf. chapter ix, note g, as a manifestation of paralytical paraphasia. What Oswald means is, "Mother, give me the morphine." Oswald's collapse is ushered in by premonitory symptoms which, according to high medical authority, are excellently described; especially his vague fears and incapacity for concentration upon any work.

## CHAPTER XI

<sup>a</sup> The tragedy was fully reported in the German newspapers. It formed the subject of an interesting *Feuilleton* by Julius Bittner in the *Neue Freie Presse*, January 13, 1911 (no. 16,665).

<sup>b</sup> Wilde, *Intentions: The Critic as Artist*, p. 209.

<sup>c</sup> *Velhagen und Klasings Monatshefte*, May, 1909, p. 23.

<sup>d</sup> Brandes maintains, in a sweeping statement, that *An Enemy of the People* contains exclusively Kierkegaardian ideas. Cf. *Die Literatur*, vol. 32, p. 21.



## CHAPTER XII

<sup>a</sup> *Die Literatur*, vol. 32, p. 69 f.

<sup>b</sup> Hedvig Ibsen, born 1832, became the wife of H. J. Stousland of Skien, a captain in the merchant service.

## CHAPTER XIII

<sup>a</sup> *Principles of Sociology*, vol. II, 2, p. 592.

<sup>b</sup> S. W. Jordan, *The Care and Culture of Men*, p. 228.

<sup>c</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>d</sup> *Rosmersholm* was begun at Munich in November, 1885, but had been planned for a long while before that. The original title was *White Horses*. Cf. *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, pp. 259-326, and *C*, p. 404. It was published in November, 1886, and first acted at Bergen, in 1887. In English it was produced by Miss Florence Farr, who took the part of Rebecca, at the Vaudeville Theatre, in February, 1891. Johannes Rosmer was impersonated by Mr. F. R. Benson.

## CHAPTER XIV

<sup>a</sup> *The Lady from the Sea* was published in 1888. A fairly complete scenario had existed since 1880. Cf. *Die neue Rundschau*, December, 1906, and *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. IV, pp. 7-50. This, in some of its main features, corresponds to the final form of the drama, yet there are also considerable differences between the two. The Scandinavian and German theatres adopted the play in 1889, without marked success. In England it has been given sporadically since 1891, in France since 1892.

<sup>b</sup> Cf. *C*, p. 90, note 1; also *C*, p. 423. She was a Dane by birth. Her principal works are *Signe's Historie*, *Solen i Siljedalen*, and *Billeder fra Vestkysten*.

<sup>c</sup> Hilda and Boletta were originally intended for *Rosmersholm*, as daughters of Johannes Rosmer. Cf. *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. III, p. 261.

<sup>d</sup> As is done by B. Litzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 108 f.

<sup>e</sup> Ehrhard, *Ibsen et le théâtre contemporain*, p. 418 f.

<sup>f</sup> Litzmann, p. 113 f.

<sup>g</sup> Litzmann, p. 116.

<sup>h</sup> E. E. Stoll, in *Modern Philology*, vol. VII, p. 570.

## CHAPTER XV

<sup>a</sup> *Hedda Gabler* was written in Munich and published in 1890. In 1892 there already existed two renderings into English and three into Russian; in 1894 it was translated into Spanish, in 1895 into Portuguese. There are no less than six parodies on *Hedda Gabler* in the English and Scandinavian languages alone, not counting those in German, French, etc. The earliest performances were given at the Residenztheater in Munich (with Frau Conrad-Ramlo in the title rôle), in January, 1891, the Lessingtheater in Berlin, in February, 1891, at Christiania (with Constance Bruun as Hedda) and Copenhagen (with Fru Hennings as Hedda), both in February, 1891.

<sup>b</sup> Colby, *Constrained Attitudes*, pp. 70-71. The chapter "The Hum-drum of Revolt" deals exclusively with *Hedda Gabler*.

<sup>c</sup> Her situation in this respect greatly resembles that of Magda in Sudermann's *Heimat* ("Magda").

<sup>d</sup> Colby, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>e</sup> Reich, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

<sup>f</sup> The comment is by Mr. Colby, so is the "ashman." Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 62 f.

<sup>g</sup> Colby, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>h</sup> Cf. Brandes, "Henrik Ibsen," *Die Literatur*, vol. 32, p. 35.

<sup>i</sup> The model for Aunt Juliana was Elise Holck, a Norwegian woman living in Dresden, where she devoted herself to the nursing of an insane sister. Cf. *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. iv, p. 336.

## CHAPTER XVI

<sup>a</sup> The London "copyright matinee" (December 7, 1892) preceded the publication. The earliest performances took place simultaneously in Trondhjem and Berlin, January 19, 1893. First public performance in England, at the Trafalgar Square Theatre, February 20, 1893. In America, the play was given at Chicago, both in Norwegian and English, in February and March, 1893. In 1900 it obtained a transient hearing in New York and several other cities. Of late years it seems to have grown somewhat in popular favor, but outside of Scandinavia it is nowhere a fixture in the repertory.

<sup>b</sup> Grumann, *loc. cit.*

<sup>c</sup> Litzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>d</sup> The story is altered, for the sake of its moral meaning, in an appendix (entitled "The Melody of the Master Builder") to the English shil-

ling edition of *The Master Builder*, by William Archer (1893). Here the hero is a journalist, not an architect.

<sup>e</sup> Cf. chapter XIV, note c; cf. also Edgar Steiger, *op. cit.*, the chapter "Weib und Ehe."

<sup>f</sup> In Brandes, "Henrik Ibsen," *Die Literatur*, pp. 83 ff. Ibsen broke off the correspondence almost abruptly. The other model for Hilda was the Danish actress, Fru Engelcke-Friis, née Wulff.

<sup>g</sup> For the symbolism of this play cf. vol. x, p. xxxi.

<sup>h</sup> Grumann, p. 4.

## CHAPTER XVII

<sup>a</sup> The publication of *Little Eyolf* preceded its presentation on the stage by a full year. The book appeared in December, 1894, in Dano-Norwegian, German, English, and French; shortly after that also in Russian, Dutch, and Italian. In Scandinavia the market success of *Little Eyolf* exceeded that of all other dramas of Ibsen. The first performance occurred at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, January 12, 1895. Within a few months of that date *Little Eyolf* was mounted by many other stages; it even reached Chicago in the spring of the same year. Two actresses of great temperamental difference yet similar artistic distinction impersonated Rita Allmers in Germany, Agnes Sorma and Adele Sandrock.

<sup>b</sup> Reich, p. 410, draws an interesting parallel with Grillparzer's *Die Jüdin von Toledo*.

<sup>c</sup> Cf. Dresdner, *op. cit.*, p. 86 f.

## CHAPTER XVIII

<sup>a</sup> *John Gabriel Borkman* was published in December, 1896, simultaneously in the original and in German. Very soon other translations followed, English, French, Russian. Again the sales were great. The usual "copyright matinée" was given in London, in December, 1896. The real première took place in Helsingfors, where on January 10, 1897, *John Gabriel Borkman* occupied the stage both at the Finnish and the Swedish theatres. The Germans first became acquainted with the play on January 16 of the same year, at Frankfort-o. M.

<sup>b</sup> Cf. Archer's introduction to *The Lady from the Sea* in vol. ix; also *SW*<sup>II</sup>, vol. iv, Einleitung, p. 349 f. The original was Wilhelm Foss, since 1878 a copyist in the State Department of the Interior. In 1877 he published a small volume of mediocre poetry. The sketch of *The Lady from the Sea* was written in 1880.

## CHAPTER XIX

<sup>a</sup> *When We Dead Awaken* was published simultaneously in Danish-Norwegian and in German in December, 1899. The earliest performance was at Stuttgart, January 26, 1900; on the following day another performance was given, at Stettin, by Dr. Heine's itinerant Ibsen Theatre. The Royal Theatre of Copenhagen gave the piece on January 28, 1900. For the preliminary draft, entitled *Resurrection Day*, cf. *SW*<sup>11</sup>, vol. iv, pp. 187 ff.

<sup>b</sup> Grumann, p. 5.

<sup>c</sup> Cf. Woerner, vol. II, p. 336.

<sup>d</sup> For this and the following remarks cf. Woerner, p. 334 f.

<sup>e</sup> As sharply stated, for instance, by Mr. Montrose J. Moses, *Henrik Ibsen, The Man and His Plays*, p. 517.





**SELECTED LIST  
OF PUBLICATIONS ON HENRIK IBSEN**



# SELECTED LIST

## OF PUBLICATIONS ON HENRIK IBSEN

OUT of the enormous bulk of the literature about Ibsen a number of books and articles of special importance are here catalogued. While due regard has been had to the accessibility of the material, it has nevertheless seemed best not to exclude the most significant foreign treatises. The extraordinarily copious and able contribution of the Germans to the subject rendered a preponderance of German titles unavoidable. The list may be readily amplified from the bibliographies itemized in section A. A considerable portion of the Ibsen literature is found in miscellaneous collections of essays, as, for instance, Charles H. Caffin's *The Appreciation of the Drama*, New York, 1908 (where five chapters are devoted to a minute analysis of *Hedda Gabler*); Walter Pritchard Eaton's *The American Stage of Today*, Boston, 1908 (with a chapter on Alla Nazimova's impersonation of Hilda in *The Master Builder*); Havelock Ellis's *The New Spirit*, London, 1890 (with a chapter on Ibsen), etc., etc.

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A very large number of Ibsen publications are found listed in the Cumulative Book Index, Poole's Index to Periodical Literature, Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Annual Library Index, Annual Magazine Subject Index, and Dramatic Index.

For contributions in German cf. especially Wolff, E., *Die deutsche Ibsen-Literatur, 1872-1905*, *Bühne und Welt*, v, pp. 566-570; 605-610; further, the *Jahresberichte für neuere deutsche Literaturgeschichte*, *Das Literarische Echo*, *Bibliographie der Zeitschriftenliteratur*, and Kayser's *Bücherlexikon*.

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